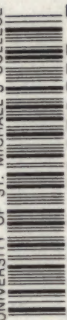


UNIVERSITY OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE



3 1761 01878532 9











Quarterly Series

FIFTY-FIFTH VOLUME

THE MOTHER OF THE KING

ROEHAMPTON

PRINTED BY JAMES STANLEY

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THE MOTHER OF THE KING

MARY DURING THE LIFE OF OUR LORD

BY

HENRY JAMES COLERIDGE

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS



LONDON

BURNS AND OATES

GRANVILLE MANSIONS W

1886

JUN 12 1952





TO THE BELOVED AND VENERATED MEMORY
OF POPE PIUS THE NINTH
WHO LIVES IN THE HEART OF THE CHURCH
AS CHOSEN AMONG THE SUCCESSORS OF ST. PETER
TO DEFINE THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE BLESSED MOTHER OF GOD





PREFACE.

THIS little work is the fulfilment of a promise made many years ago to a friend, now, as I trust, with God, the execution of which I am unwilling to delay any longer, though for many reasons I should be glad to do so. I am deeply conscious of the many imperfections of this volume, and must trust it to the compassion of the Blessed Queen in whose honour it has been written, with the prayer that she may deign to accept and bless it to some little good for the souls of her children.

I must ask any readers that it may find to pardon what has been inevitable, namely, the fact that, as this volume goes over the ground which has already been traversed in some other publications from the same hand, they will find in it a considerable amount of matter which has also been treated of in those publications, especially the three volumes lately put forth on *The Holy Infancy*. I have not copied from those volumes, but the present work, though not the same in scope with them, is the fruit of the same reading and the same reflection which

furnished their material. The Life of our Lady is in one aspect a part of the Life of our Lord, and cannot be separated, nor would it be well to attempt to separate it, therefrom. I must hope that the beauty and ineffable importance of the subject may to some extent obviate the irksomeness which might otherwise arise, on account of the comparative want of novelty in some parts of the volume.

It is mainly on account of the tendency to endeavour to put asunder what God has joined together, the Life of our Lord and the Life of His Blessed Mother, that a false conception obtains among so many Christians as to the position and office and work of that Blessed Mother in the Kingdom of her Son. The Gospel narratives of the earliest years of our Lord are full of our Blessed Lady. But the part of the history which deals with His Public Life makes only a few and, as it seems, occasional mentions of her. But there is nothing in the divinely ordered history of the Gospel which is only occasional, in the common sense of the word. And when we come to lay as a foundation of our thoughts concerning her a deep study of what Catholic theologians tell us about her, and then to take into account all that is to be learnt from the few passages in which she is mentioned, and also all that the enlightened Christian reason has concluded concerning her, by the use of

that beautiful habit of her own, of keeping all the mysteries of which she was the instrument or the witness and pondering them in her heart, we begin to see that her life must have been most closely interwoven with His, a life of continual sympathy and cooperation with Him, even at those times of the history, in which there is seldom any direct mention of her name.

We may add to this that her position during the Life of our Lord must most naturally be considered as the foundation of the position she has afterwards ever held in His Kingdom, the seedtime of grace which has borne the harvest of her glories. Thus it is very important that we should have a true conception of what the position of Mary during the Public Life was, and how it was itself the fruit of all that she saw and did and gained in the Holy Infancy, and in the Hidden Life, as well as itself the foundation of what was to be afterwards. If there is anything new in this volume it will probably be the attempt to point this out, and I shall be content if I have at all succeeded in doing this to the satisfaction of my readers. The Life of our Blessed Lady was a continuous and most beautiful whole, a path of justice,¹ to use the Scriptural image, like a shining light, going forward and increasing ever more and more unto the perfect day. But the dawn

of Mary was in the full "brightness of the saints," and, while the days of which our life is made up mount up to a certain measure of splendour and then again wane therein, the splendours of this Blessed Mother went on and on in a perpetual increase of glory which knew no evening.

It is in harmony with these truths that we should be ready to believe that during the latter portion of the Life of our Lady, that which ensued after the Ascension of our Lord, she should have had a position and a work in the Kingdom which He had founded, which might be said to grow out of what she was in the Public Life and in the Holy Infancy, before that Public Life began. Certainly this portion of her earthly course cannot be left without honour and deep meditation by those who would be faithful children, and although we have so little of direct information concerning it, we cannot be said to have none. I hope to add a sequel to the present work in which to consider what may be gathered concerning this. It is this great subject, which ought to embrace her position in His Church, as far as it can be gathered, both on earth during her last fifteen years, and in Heaven ever since, which I hope may form the subject of another volume, supplementing the present, which, however, is, in a certain sense, complete in itself. It concludes with the solemn pause before the Resurrection, and does

not go beyond it to the Ascension or to Pentecost. The Resurrection was in truth the beginning of the new Kingdom, of which the Forty days were the immediate earthly inauguration, as the Ascension was itself its opening mystery in Heaven above. All things were made new in the Resurrection of our Lord. That is therefore the natural point at which to pause, before proceeding further in the attempt to trace out the beginnings of that immense influence, power, and activity of His Mother, of which the Church on earth is full, though not so full as the Church in Heaven.

H. J. C.

31, Farm Street, Berkeley Square.

Fifth Friday in Lent, Feast of the Most Precious Blood, 1886.



CONTENTS.

PREFACE	PAGE vii—xi
-------------------	----------------

BOOK I.

MARY BEFORE THE INCARNATION.

	PAGE		PAGE
CHAPTER I.		Great beauty of her sou .	16
<i>The Design of God.</i>		Devoted to God from the	
Words applied to Mary		beginning	17
by the Church	1	The source of all her graces	19
Design of God for her	2		
His delight in His plans	3	CHAPTER III.	
Predictions and antici-		<i>Mary in the Womb.</i>	
pations	4	How we are to know the	
Revelation of His counsel	5	history of Mary	20
Various anticipations	6	What we conclude con-	
Importance of these de-		cerning her	21
crees	7	Reasons for the silence of	
		Scripture	22
CHAPTER II.		Scripture does not repeat	
<i>The Immaculate Conception.</i>		itself	23
Privileges of all the saints		Nor deal with the organi-	
found in Mary	9	zation of the Church	24
Distinction of parentage	10	The doctrine was to grow	25
Saints under affliction	11	Office of theological rea-	
Mary to be like her Son	12	son	26
Freedom from original sin	13	Scripture discourages	
Foundation of other gifts	14	curiosity	28
Anticipated use of intel-		Two classes of facts	29
ligence and will	15	God's interior workings	30

	PAGE		PAGE
Historical incidents	31	Ancient love for the	
Importance of the Imma-		Temple	53
culate Conception	32	Visits of Angels	54
St. Bernardine's doctrine	33	Study of Scriptures	55
What we know about		A great means of light	56
Mary	34	Public prayers and	
		praises	57
CHAPTER IV.		The sacrifices	58
<i>Birth of our Blessed Lady.</i>		Fruits of holiness in	
Birth, the joy of the		Mary	59
mother	35	The Counsel of Chastity	60
St. Anne	36	Necessity of great grace	61
Parents of our Lady	37	Mary's vow	61
Childbearing of her		Summary of her prepara-	
mother	38	tion	62
How the child might			
rejoice	39	CHAPTER VII.	
Our Lady's use of intel-		<i>The Espousals of Mary.</i>	
ligence	41	Swiftiness of God's ways	64
CHAPTER V.		Time for Mary's be-	
<i>Childhood of Mary.</i>		trothal	65
Early manifestations of		The prophecies about our	
character	43	Lord's Mother	66
Effect of her graces in		Mary's case provided for	
Mary	44	by Law	67
Her character moulded		Her silence	68
thereby	45	Preparation and choice of	
The mysteries of Redemp-		St. Joseph	68
tion	46	His relationship to Mary	69
Presentation in the Temple	47	He becomes aware of	
It was her natural home	48	Mary's purpose	70
Probability of the fact	49	His consent	71
		Mary's prayer for him	72
CHAPTER VI.		Reasons for the arrange-	
<i>Mary in the Temple.</i>		ment	73
Preparation of Mary	51	Perfection of the union	74
The community of mai-		Trials of Mary	75
dens	52	Assaults of Satan	76
		Her great humility	77

BOOK II.

MARY FROM THE INCARNATION TO THE END OF THE
HIDDEN LIFE.

	PAGE		PAGE
CHAPTER I.		The Three Persons and	
<i>Mary at the Annunciation.</i>		Mary	103
Soon after the marriage	81	Her other titles	106
Perfection of Mary	82		
Her great graces and		CHAPTER II.	
dignity	83	<i>Mary at the Visitation.</i>	
Satan blinded to her great-		Providential action	108
ness	84	St. Joseph and the Visi-	
The Salutation of Gabriel	85	tation	109
Shock to her humility	86	Journey of Mary	110
Her prudence	87	Salutation of Elisabeth	111
Second words of St.		Virtues of Mary	111
Gabriel	88	The <i>Magnificat</i>	113
Mary to conceive a Son	89	Mary at the Visitation	114
Scriptural character of		Her work complete	115
the language	90	St. Joseph	116
Meaning of the words	90	Their reunion	117
Our Lord spoken of as		Interval before the Nati-	
King	92	vity	118
Our Lady's intelligence of			
Scripture	93	CHAPTER III.	
Her question	94	<i>Mary at the Nativity.</i>	
Scripture silent as to the		Childbearing of Mary	120
manner	94	Privilege of integrity	122
Third words of the Angel	94	Immunity from all pain	123
Their meaning	97	Conversation with others	124
The sign given	97	" Keeping in her heart "	125
Mary free in her con-		The habit of her life	126
sent	99	Increase of graces	127
Her obedience	100	Twofold gift	128
The Incarnation	101	Our Lady's intelligence	129
Elevation of Mary	102		
Her privileges	103		
Mother of God	104		

	PAGE		PAGE
CHAPTER IV.		Blessing of intercession .	154
<i>Forty Days.</i>		Progress of our Lady .	155
The Holy Family at Beth-			
lehem	130	CHAPTER VII.	
Subject of contemplation .	131	<i>Mary in Egypt.</i>	
Circumcision of our Lord .	132	The Flight	156
The Holy Name	135	Jews of the dispersion .	157
Connection with Circum-		Preparation of the Gen-	
cision	136	tiles	158
		Jews in Egypt	159
CHAPTER V.		The heathen	160
<i>Mary at the Purification.</i>		God's children among	
Going to the Temple	138	them	161
Joy of our Lady	139	Fresh subjects of prayer .	162
Presentation	140		
First revelation of the		CHAPTER VIII.	
Passion.	141	<i>The Home at Nazareth.</i>	
Prediction as to our		Our Lord to be a Naza-	
Lady	142	rene	164
Return to Nazareth.	143	Silence of the Gospels .	165
A trial to Mary	143	Contemplation of our	
		Lady	166
CHAPTER VI.		Uniformity of the life .	167
<i>Mary at the Epiphany.</i>		Conversation with our	
The Wise Kings	146	Lord	168
Mary's knowledge	147	Its immense value	169
The Gentiles in the Gospel		Communicativeness of our	
Canticles	148	Lord	170
Inheritance of the first		Fitness of our Lady.	171
Promise	149	Her greatness	172
The great ones of the		The honour of God and	
world	150	our Lord	173
The Gentile nations.	151	Her insight into the	
Kingdom of our Lord	151	Gospel Law.	174
The Passion anticipated .	152	Kingdom of our Lord .	175
Invitation to prayer.	152	Impressions of common	
Contemplation of our		life	176
Lord	153	The Hidden Life	177
		Intelligence of mysteries .	178

	PAGE		PAGE
CHAPTER IX.		CHAPTER X.	
<i>The Mystery of the Twelfth Year.</i>		<i>Eighteen Years.</i>	
Our Lord in the Temple	180	Last part of the Hidden Life	191
Why was our Lady left in ignorance?	181	Return to Nazareth	192
Her relation to our Lord	182	Choice of our Lord	193
Parents and God	183	The virtue of obedience	194
Duty to parents may be overridden	184	Our Lady as Superior	194
Why our Lord was silent	185	The New Law made known to her	195
Value of His example	186	Significance of the eighteen years	196
Virtues of our Lady	187	Illness of St. Joseph	197
The work of the Father	188	Exercise of charity	198
Suffering of our Lady	189	Death of St. Joseph	198
		Work of the Hidden Life	199
		Increase of grace in our Lady	200

BOOK III.

MARY DURING THE PUBLIC LIFE.

CHAPTER I.		Prayer an indispensable element		212
<i>Interior occupations of Mary.</i>		Intercession for various needs		213
Great change in our Lord's existence	203	Her knowledge of our Lord's plans		214
Separation from our Lady not continual	204	Preternatural provisions.		215
Her companionship with Him	205	Our Lord and the Saints		216
A life of prayer	206	CHAPTER II.		
Intercourse with our Lord	207	<i>Mary after our Lord's departure.</i>		
Reasons for her enlightenment	208	Beginning of the Public Life		218
Features of the Public Life	209	Preaching of St. John		219
Mary's habits as before	210	The first missionary enterprise.		220
Life with and for our Lord	211			

	PAGE		PAGE
Our Lord's Baptism	221	Our Lady's knowledge of the Incarnation	243
Necessity of conversion	222	Her knowledge of the actions of our Lord	244
Fasting and temptation	223	Our Lord at Capharnaum	246
Victory over Satan	224	Pasch at Jerusalem	247
The Mother of the af- flicted	225	Our Lord in Judæa	248
During the forty days	226	Boldness of the Priests	249
St. John and the Phari- sees	226	Our Lady at Cana	250
Danger of the Chief Priests	227	Our Lord at Sichem	251
Return of our Lord	228	Prayers of our Lady	252
The first disciples	229	The nobleman's son	252
		Nazareth and Caphar- naum	253
		Our Lady at Caphar- naum	254
		Call of the four Apostles	255
CHAPTER III.		The Sabbath at Caphar- naum	256
<i>Mary at the beginning of signs.</i>		Preaching in Galilee	257
The Marriage at Cana	231	Sermon on the Mount	258
Occasion of the feast	232	Our Lady's contemplation	259
Our Lady's part	233	Intelligence	260
His compassion	234	Our Lady and the Apostles	262
Desire for the glory of God	235	Miracles after the Sermon	263
Meaning of our Lord's words	235	Call of St. Matthew	265
Circumstances of the miracle	236	Revelations of our Lord	266
Manifestation to the dis- ciples	237	Variety in His labours	267
The Sacred Heart	238	Increase of knowledge in our Lady	268
Miracles of the Saints	239		
Mary's joy	240	CHAPTER V.	
		<i>Mary during the Second Year's Ministry.</i>	
CHAPTER IV.		Arrangement of the inci- dents	269
<i>Mary during the first Galilaean Preaching.</i>		The Priests at Jerusalem	270
Meditation on the Passion with our Lady	241	Importance of their atti- tude	271
Writers on the Public Life	242	The Second Pasch	272
		St. John's account	273

	PAGE
Hostility of the Priests determined . . .	274
Prayer of our Lady . . .	275
Patience of our Lord . . .	276
The people's dulness . . .	277
Retirement of our Lord . . .	278
A new phase in His Ministry . . .	279
Call of the Apostles . . .	279
Sermon on the Plain . . .	280
Miracles of this time . . .	281
The disciples of St. John . . .	282
Denunciation of favoured cities . . .	283
Magdalene . . .	283
The pious women . . .	284
Calumnies of the Pharisees . . .	285
Incident of our Lady . . .	285
Explanation . . .	286
Surmises . . .	288
Opportuneness of the incident . . .	289
Lesson of detachment . . .	290

CHAPTER VI.

Mary during the training of the Apostles

Teaching by Parables . . .	292
Incidents of this time . . .	293
Miracles . . .	294
Hostility to our Lord . . .	295
Motives of His conduct . . .	296
Mission of the Apostles . . .	297
Miracle of the Loaves . . .	298
The Blessed Sacrament . . .	299
Character of some miracles . . .	300
Confession of St. Peter . . .	301

Graces of our Lady . . .	302
Foundation of the Church . . .	303
Ministry of the Keys . . .	304
Joy of our Lord . . .	305
And of His Mother . . .	306

CHAPTER VII.

Mary during our Lord's last Preaching.

Period after the Confession . . .	307
Doctrine of the Cross . . .	308
Transfiguration . . .	309
Subsequent incidents . . .	309
The Feast of Tabernacles . . .	310
Judæa and Peræa . . .	311
Characteristics of the teaching . . .	311
In the country of Judæa . . .	312
Tenderness of the teaching . . .	313
Miracles . . .	314
Our Lady at this time . . .	315
Familiarity with the Passion . . .	315
Open prediction . . .	316
Joy at the doctrine of the Cross . . .	317
Was our Lady at the Transfiguration? . . .	318
Transfer of preaching to Judæa . . .	319
Raising of Lazarus . . .	320
Effect of the miracle . . .	321
Our Lord in Peræa . . .	322
Various kinds of teaching . . .	323
The Supper at Bethany . . .	324

BOOK IV.

MARY DURING THE PASSION.

	PAGE		PAGE
CHAPTER I.		Instruction about the	
<i>The First Days of Holy Week.</i>		Blessed Sacrament	351
Our Lady at Bethany	329	Break in St. John's	
The Day of Palms	330	account	353
Our Lord as King	331	Our Lady's intelligence	354
Charge against Herod	331	Incidents after the Supper	355
His manner all through	332	Instructions on the Sacra-	
Parables and other utter-		ments	356
ances	333	The Apostles not fully	
Last prophecies	334	enlightened	357
Holy Thursday	335	The Blessed Eucharist	358
Judicial character of our		Our Lady's Communion	359
Lord's action	336	Last incidents	360
Our Lord's enemies cowed	337		
Our Lady's expectation	338	CHAPTER III.	
Prayer for Judas	339	<i>The Compassion of Mary in</i>	
The Parables and Pre-		<i>general.</i>	
dictions	340	Revelations on the Sorrows	362
Our Lord as Prophet	341	Our Lady's intelligence	
Our Lady at the Last		of the Passion	362
Supper	342	Restoration of all things	363
Answer to objections	343	Her knowledge of the	
		Sacred Humanity	364
CHAPTER II.		Sympathy with our Lord	365
<i>Holy Thursday.</i>		The Will of God	366
Swiftiness and order of		Intense pity for men	367
events	345	No confusion in the Pas-	
Immense affectionateness		sion	367
of our Lord	346	Poignancy of grief	368
Presence of our Lady	347	The Anger of God	369
Events of the evening	348	She was fortified to bear	
The Pasch	348	more	370
Washing of the feet	349	Under a sentence	371
Mention of the traitor	350	Her share in the sufferings	372
Gap in the narrative	351	Three parts in the Com-	
		passion	373

CHAPTER IV.	PAGE	CHAPTER VI.	PAGE
<i>The Garden and the Tribunals.</i>		<i>The Way of the Cross.</i>	
First part of the Passion . . .	375	Stations of the Cross . . .	399
Pilate's Prætorium . . .	376	Our Lord in His own garments . . .	400
Herod's Palace . . .	376	Sympathy of Mary . . .	401
Our Lady and the in- terior sufferings . . .	377	Incidents of the Way of Sorrows . . .	402
Sense of guilt . . .	378	Meeting our Lady . . .	403
Fear of pain . . .	379	Interior pain . . .	404
Unavailing sufferings . . .	379	"Daughters of Jerusalem" . . .	405
Our Lord's Heart . . .	380	The Crucifixion . . .	406
Mary following all . . .	381	The mockings . . .	407
The outrages . . .	382	The darkness . . .	408
Our Lady alone perfectly faithful . . .	383		
Hopes of our Lord's friends . . .	384	CHAPTER VII.	
Mary's knowledge . . .	385	<i>Mary on Calvary.</i>	
CHAPTER V.		The earliest Words . . .	409
<i>The Prætorium.</i>		The garments . . .	410
Our Lady in the street . . .	387	The title . . .	411
Consolation and pain . . .	387	The first Word . . .	411
At the Scourging . . .	389	Immense mercy . . .	412
Insults to our Lord's modesty . . .	389	The Thief on the cross . . .	414
Judicial character of the Scourging . . .	390	His confession . . .	415
Power of devotion to our Lady . . .	391	The second Word . . .	416
Our Lord speaking of His Scourging . . .	392	Prayer of Dismas . . .	417
Meaning of the Corona- tion . . .	393	Our Lord's answer . . .	417
Incidents in the Præ- torium . . .	394	Dismas to be with Him . . .	418
The national crime . . .	396	Advance in the three first Words . . .	418
Providence over nations . . .	397	They all impart fruits of the Passion . . .	419
		The third Word . . .	420
		First meaning . . .	421
		Requires deepening . . .	421
		Our Lady "the Woman" . . .	422
		Messianic meaning . . .	423
		Mother and Son . . .	424

	PAGE		PAGE
Our Lady's position	424	Piercing of the Side	444
Growth in sanctity	425	Birth of the Church	446
The Charge from the		Longinus	447
Cross	426	Preparation for the Burial	447
St. John's dignity	427	Joseph and Nicodemus	448
Others included in him	428	Arrival at Calvary	449
Charge to him	429	The Deposition	450
"He took her to his own"	430	The Entombment	451
The relation now created	431	Our Lady leaving Calvary	452
The Word explained by			
facts	433		
Commentary by history	434	CHAPTER VIII.	
The last Words	435	<i>Holy Saturday.</i>	
Time when they were		Providence	453
spoken	436	Rallying of the disciples	454
The fourth Word	437	By our Lady	455
The fifth Word	439	Her occupations	456
The sixth Word	440	Contemplation	457
Approach of death	442	Charity and mercy	458
Our Lord after Death	442	The disciples coming to	
The mourners on Calvary	443	her	459
Our Lady's work	443	Saturday night	460

BOOK I.

MARY BEFORE THE INCARNATION.



CHAPTER I.

THE DESIGN OF GOD

THE Church on more than one occasion applies to our Blessed Lady the great words which are found in the Book of Proverbs, spoken there of the Wisdom of God. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning. I was set up from eternity, and of old, before the earth was made. The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived, neither had the fountains of waters as yet sprung out. The mountains with their huge bulk had not as yet been established. Before the hills I was brought forth,"¹ and the rest. The truth which is contained in this application is beyond all question, and might have been assumed as true, if we had not this especial sanction for believing it from the authority of the Church. For His own work "is known to the Lord from the beginning,"² as St. James said in the Council of Jerusalem. In this there is no difference between the design of God with regard to Mary and His design concerning any other of His creatures. The difference lies in the importance of the design in this case over that of any other, in the greatness

¹ Proverbs viii. 22, seq.

² Acts xv. 18.

of the work of God which He determined to perform, in the treasures of wisdom and power and love which He chose to lavish upon this work rather than on any other, that is, in the supreme beauty of the plan, and the mighty attributes of power and holiness and mercy which He intended to exert in its execution.

This design of God is the foundation of the whole greatness and glory of this Blessed Mother. It derived its pre-eminent beauty and greatness from the close union between the Mother and the Son in the great decree of the Incarnation. In that decree it is impossible to separate them. The Incarnate Son, according to the decree of the Most Blessed Trinity, must have a Mother, and she with all her graces and glories is, for His sake, a part of the decree itself. It being once settled that God was to become Man by the way of generation from a Mother, that Mother belongs to the decree of the Incarnation as much, though not so directly, as the Sacred Humanity itself. The designs of God are all supremely beautiful in the degree which belongs to each, and this design of the Incarnation was the greatest of all God's designs, and was to issue in the greatest and most beautiful of all His works. He could give nothing more than Himself, and thus the Divine Maternity of Mary is a work which cannot be surpassed. It is therefore one of those most beautiful of the works of God in which He Himself takes an actual part, as in the Sacred Humanity of our Lord, the redemption of the world, and the beatification of the saints by the possession of Himself in Heaven.

We know that in earthly designs, as when some

great genius endeavours to express his thoughts in music or in poetry, a sculptor in marble, or a painter on his canvas, the idea itself is far more beautiful than its expression. That idea itself also, as well as its expression, grows in perfection and magnificence with the progress of time, as it germinates and expands and ripens in the mind which has conceived it, or in the vehicle which is used for its outward manifestation. But in the designs of God there is absolute perfection and fulness and ripeness from the very first. For God must conceive at once with the highest possible beauty, and when He sets His hand to the accomplishment of His plan there is no possible lack of power or resource in carrying it out. Thus the magnificent designs of God in the formation of the Sacred Humanity and in its Hypostatic Union with the Eternal Son were for ever present to Him, and were carried out by Him with perfect and faultless integrity in the time which He had appointed. The pre-existence of these glories and beauties in His mind is what is dwelt upon in the passage from the Wise Man of which mention has been made. It gives a dignity and grandeur to the design itself, which is said to have been before all other things in the mind of God—before them, not chiefly in the order of time, but rather in the order of His counsels from eternity, in which other things depend on and are chosen in relation to this, not this in relation to and for the sake of other things. For our Lord is the end and final cause of the whole creation. The words of Scripture which have been quoted represent God to us as contemplating with intense delight from the beginning this great and

marvellous plan, a part of which was the creation of Mary and all the gifts and glories which were to find their home in her.

This simple truth contains the whole foundation of what we are familiar with in the private devotions and sacred solemnities of the Church and her children, in which the truths which we have received concerning our Lord and His Blessed Mother find their natural expression in the honour and love which we pay to both. Nothing that her most devout servants have ever said of the greatness of Mary, but rests on this truth. And we may surely feel that we are bound on our own part to correspond in our measure with this contemplation, so to speak, of God, and that what He has dwelt on so lovingly from all eternity must be one of the most profitable and legitimate subjects for the occupation of such intelligence as He has given to us.

Another consideration concerning this design of God as to our Blessed Lady, may well be founded on what we have inherited in the prophetic anticipations and predictions which relate to our Lord and His Mother. For it is the rule of God's dealings with us to prepare His great works beforehand, and to execute them in the time which He has chosen, and moreover not to do this suddenly and without warning to us, but on the contrary, after preparing us also for them by various kinds of prediction. Many reasons may be given for this arrangement of God, for the predictions concerning the Incarnation and its fruits were necessary as the objects and food of faith and hope, and thus they supported the spiritual life of those who lived before the execution of the design, as

well as after it. In the one case previous knowledge, in the other knowledge subsequent to the execution, was necessary for men. But it is a distinct truth, when we set ourselves to count up what God has done for us in this respect, that He not only dwelt Himself with the utmost complacency from all eternity on His great work of love and mercy and power, and with a contemplation which included us also as the objects of the ineffable love which was therein embodied, but also that He broke the revelation of His exceeding beneficence to us long beforehand, from the very beginning of His dealings with our race, gradually increasing the splendour and clearness of the manifestation as the time drew nigh, and making it all the while the source of infinite spiritual blessings to our souls. The design of God for the creation of Mary is one thing, and His merciful and tender consideration for us in revealing it beforehand is another.

It belongs therefore to our subject to consider this revelation of the counsel of God in the second place, after the conception of the design of infinite mercy in the Eternal Mind. It begins with the creation of a helpmate to Adam in the person of Eve, who was to be called by a name which did not perfectly befit one who was the author of all our woe, the Mother of all living. She was so-called for the sake of Mary, who was to be the second and truer Eve, as our Lord was to be the second Adam. Thus the fountain of prophecy rises from the ground in the garden of Paradise, and the human race starts on its weary pilgrimage through successive ages with the vision

before it of a Mother between whom and Satan an endless and truceless warfare was set by the hand of God Himself, and whose Child was to be the deliverer of the race whose nature He was to take from her.

This original prophecy made faith in the coming redemption possible to man, and so served as the foundation of hope and religion, and the means of reconciliation with God. In the course of ages it grew into a great stream, and as streams widen as they move onwards by the addition of numberless affluents, so did this prophecy widen more and more in the course of generations by the specification of its details, as it came to be revealed more and more precisely to what nation and tribe and family the promised Deliverer was to belong, and it came to be a matter of notoriety when and where He should come into the world. This kind of preparation for the fulfilment of the promise was accompanied by the appearance, from time to time, in the history of the chosen people, of events which foreshadowed the deliverance itself, its manner and its effects, as well as by the presence of a series of heroic characters reflecting beforehand the features of the future Messiah, anticipating portions of His career, as well as the singular holiness of His Life. At the same time we find in the stream of these predictions and anticipations, constantly recurring references to the figure of the Mother who appears by His side in the original promise. She herself is made the subject of a fresh series of anticipations of the same kind with Him. Thus when the Blessed Mother is honoured in Christian devotion by the side of her

Son, it is the delight of the religious soul to see how all has come about, as St. Paul says to St. Timothy, "according to the prophecies going before on" her,³ the history interpreting the prophecies, and the prophecies shedding a light of their own on the history.

Thus, while Noe and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, Moses and Josue, Samson and Samuel, David and a long succession of saints and heroes after him down to the Machabean defenders and deliverers of the people, handed on each in his own way, the various features of His character or the various offices which He was to fulfil as Lawgiver or Prophet or King or Captain or Teacher, and while the perpetual sacrifices offered in the Temple, as in the Tabernacle before the Temple was built, spoke continually to the people of the great work of redemption which was to be accomplished by Him and of the application of its fruits for the various needs of the soul, so was there, by the side of this stream of prediction concerning the Son, another running parallel with it concerning the Mother who was to be associated with Him in her measure and degree. She was prefigured in holy women who had borne prominent parts in great deliverances, Mary her namesake the sister of Moses, or Jael the destroyer of Sisera, or the good Queen Esther, who saved the Jews in their captivity, or the chaste and valiant Judith. She was seen in the bush that burned and was not consumed, in the fleece of Gedeon, in the cloud that arose out of the sea at the prayer of Elias, and in the Ark of the Covenant, the perpetual treasure of the sanctuary, as well as

in the prophecies which spoke clearly of her incommunicable privilege of Virgin Maternity and fruitful Virginity.

It is not here the place to trace out all the details of the prophetic and typical anticipations either of our Lord or of His Blessed Mother. But the fact itself is worthy of our devout remembrance. It shows us the great importance of this particular arrangement in the designs of God. It shows us the delight which He had in the decree of His love concerning Mary. It shows us how He thought fit to prepare the chosen people and the world at large for her position in the coming Kingdom. It makes her at once an object of the most intense and grateful veneration, founded, not only on what she is, but also on what God in various ways said of her before He called her into the world. We can have no higher ambition, no more dutiful desire, than that we should think and feel about the great works of God, as far as that is possible to us, with an estimation and appreciation, an intelligence and devotion, which may correspond to His own thoughts concerning those great works, in which He has not only shed out His power and manifested His holiness, but in which He has also been so exceedingly and ineffably merciful to us and beneficent to us. There is something deficient in our correspondence to His condescensions when we do not try to stretch our feeble minds, our purblind intelligences, and above all our narrow and cold hearts, as far as may be, to take in and understand and give thanks for all that He has done for us. We are so blind and lost in the things of sense, that we are inclined to think

that our intelligences and hearts have been given us to be used on them alone, and that it is a kind of invasion of the rights of this lower world to use these gifts on the things of God for which they were in truth given us. And we may be sure also that we shall gain and rise in spiritual strength and in blessings of every kind, if we thus exert ourselves to do what we can in these respects. Thus, then, we may lay the foundation of our considerations concerning Mary and God's dealings with and in her, by the devout contemplation of the eternal designs of God in her respect, and of the great mercy by which He determined not only to lavish on her so large a magnificence of His treasures, but also to prepare our minds by proclaiming beforehand how great she was to be as the chosen vessel of His mercies.

CHAPTER II.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

IN accordance with a principle to which we are guided by the use made by the saints and the Church of the great instrument of theological reasoning, we are accustomed to look, in the life of the Blessed Virgin, for all the various privileges and blessings which are found elsewhere in the lives of the saints of God, as far as such privileges and blessings could fitly find a place in her glorious course. It would perhaps be rather more accurate to say that we find in the lives of the saints the several glories and graces which are found in her, but that in her they are collected and in them they are dispersed, no one having them all as she has, nor in the same beauty and perfection as she. This is not, as we shall see, to attribute to Mary idle and useless honours and decorations, as if a great king were to lavish the honours of his state on a favourite child, before that child was able to wear them with fitting dignity or to use them for his service, to put arms or military commands into the hands of a baby or a girl, or to give to a blind boy books and beautiful pictures. There is nothing in all the range of the gifts which we find in Mary from the very first which is un-

becoming her state or condition, or for which there is not a good reason, even to our poor powers of intelligence. Now let us apply the principle of which we speak in some particular instances.

It is a distinction on earth to be born of royal parents and to be the heir of a long and illustrious line, and this distinction naturally belonged to her who was to be the mother of the promised King of the house of David. But the parents of Mary were in no way conspicuous in position, the royal line having then, for many generations, fallen altogether into obscurity and even, as it seems, some degree of poverty. There is another and a greater distinction which is found in some of the saints of God, and is a great blessing wherever it is found. This consists in the sanctity and virtues of the parents who bring a child into the world. We find this in our Blessed Lady, and we find more than this. For she has that special blessing which attaches to the children, not simply of saints, but of saints who have had the discipline of affliction to prepare them for their office, in the designs of God, of being the parents of saints like themselves. This discipline of affliction we find in the holy pair, Anne and Joachim, and it is affliction, not of any common kind, but having particular reference to the Divine Providence which watched over them as to the fruitfulness of their marriage.

We have more than one instance in the history of the Old Testament of mothers who have been afflicted for a long time with the supposed disgrace of sterility, and who have then been made the parents of children who were to become great instruments

or great servants of God. Such especially was the namesake of the mother of our Blessed Lady, the holy mother of the Prophet Samuel, to whom it is not unreasonable to think that that blessed mother had a deep devotion, which she may have handed on to her own child, and of which we see the traces in the *Magnificat*. The affliction of which we speak was in both cases the cause of much prayer, patience, resignation, humility, and other virtues which fitted the saints in question for the reception, in the good time appointed by Providence, of that fruitfulness as a boon of Heaven, which so many others receive as a natural right. Such affliction also prepares them to exercise greater purity of intention and a more perfect reverence and continency in the use of their marriage, and this brings down a blessing on themselves and on their children. We see this in the case of the other holy Anna, and her husband, the younger Tobias. These circumstances are all found in the parents of our Blessed Lady, whose conception was the fruit of prayer and the reward of much patient submission to the will of God, under trials and reproaches. For in those days sterility was a reproach, as we see also in the parents of the blessed Baptist, himself one of the greatest of saints and the child of prayer and affliction.

In this way the conception of the Blessed Mother of God was one which might bring down on her and her parents great blessings, and might have been expected to deserve a kind of special sanctification. We know that this honour and privilege was not wanting in her. But we know far more than this.

For she was to be the Mother of the Immaculate Lamb of God, and her entrance into existence was to take its chief honours and privileges, from her Child, rather than from her parents. We come here upon another rule which is found to obtain in the dealings of God with Mary. This rule is that she was to be, for the sake of her Son, as like Him in His Sacred Humanity as was possible, deriving from His inherent fulness of grace that fulness of the same grace of which she was capable, all her grace being received and imparted, while all His was His own by natural right and possession. He was full of grace and truth because He was the Incarnate Son, and it is to His glory, not only that all who receive any grace shall receive it from Him, but that all should receive from Him as much grace as possible, and that in this His Mother should be pre-eminent, who was to be, more than any other could be, His companion and the partaker of all His thoughts.

With regard to our Lord Himself, it was altogether impossible that He could be born in original sin, which was the doom of all who were generated from Adam by natural generation. He could not be in any sense morally averse from God, which is the lot of all so born. He could not have an intelligence clouded by ignorance, a will enfeebled, that interior disorder which ensues from the want of power and authority in the ruling faculties of man over the lower and the more sensuous. These and all other moral miseries of those born in original sin could not possibly have place in Him. They had not been in our first parents, being shut out by the gift

of original justice, which gave order and peace and light and strength to their souls, so that they were not kingdoms divided against themselves. What our Lord could not be subject to in this respect, our Blessed Lady would have been subject to by the rule which applied to all the children of Adam generated in the ordinary way, except for the fact that she was to be His Mother and that, for His merits and on His account, she was not to be allowed to fall under that rule. Thus the ban of that original sin never came home to her, and as far as that alone is considered, she was conceived as Adam and Eve had been created, without the stain of that aversion from God which has been mentioned, with no darkness on her intelligence, in consequence, nor lack of power in her will, no disorder in the interior kingdom, no rebellion of the lower faculties against the rule of reason, and she was clothed also with a mantle of ineffable graces and spiritual endowments by far surpassing any that they had received before their fall.

It is clear that, with regard to these graces and endowments which may have been bestowed by God on any of His intelligent creatures, over and above the natural gifts which were required to make their rational service of Him possible, the freedom from the effects and contagion of original sin as above explained must be pre-supposed as the foundation of such gifts. Such freedom may be imparted in two ways, either by preservation from the stain altogether, or by the healing of the effects of the stain, as far as such healing is requisite for the purpose of God. It cannot be imagined

that the gifts of the Holy Ghost, or the infused virtues, and the like, which are generally considered to accompany the regeneration of the soul, as in holy Baptism, could be imparted to a soul averse from God, in the sense in which such aversion is the fruit of original sin. To say this would be the same thing as to say that original justice and original sin could co-exist in the same soul, at the same time, light and darkness, heat and cold. Thus the gift of exemption from original sin, or of the removal of certain of its effects when it has been incurred, is the gift also of the necessary qualification of the soul for the spiritual gifts of grace of whatever order and degree. It cannot be doubted that our Blessed Lady received in the fullest possible abundance these gifts and graces which were to fit her for the great office of her Maternity, and to be the weapons of her most faithful service of God from the first moment of her life to the very last. It belonged to that fulness of grace which Mary could receive, that she should be thus enriched at the first by the marvellous bounty of God. Thus the Immaculate Conception paved the way for, and was immediately crowned by, this immense dowry of graces which it was fitting that the mother of God should receive.

In addition to this we find, in one at least of the great saints of God, what was probably extended to others also, another special favour which must have accompanied in Mary the bestowal of the graces on her of which we have spoken. For we find that the Blessed Precursor of our Lord, St. John Baptist, was not only sanctified in his mother's womb and so freed from original sin, but was also

2/ endowed then and there, as soon as the voice of the salutation of the Mother of God sounded in the ears of his own mother, St. Elizabeth, with the use of his reason, the power of full intelligence and will, so that from that moment he was enabled to begin serving God with the service of the interior acts of virtue which were possible in cases such as his. The Divine reason for this special grace in the case of St. John may have been manifold. This acceleration of the use of his reason and will may have been granted by God, in order that his consummate and most lofty sanctity might begin from the very first possible moment to expand and ripen and multiply itself, by his own cooperation with the gifts of grace, and that thus no time might be lost in the perfection of a soul which was to be so supremely dear to our Lord. But at the moment of the sanctification of St. John in the womb of St. Elizabeth, he was as yet thirty years off the time when his great work of preaching was to begin. At the time of the Conception of Mary in the womb of St. Anne, only about half that length of time was to pass before she was to be called on, in the plenitude of her sanctity, to give her consent to be made the Mother of God.

2/ Thus Mary was to attain to a far higher degree of sanctity than was required for the office of St. John, and she was to acquire it in a far shorter time. It is not therefore wonderful if we find this gift of the acceleration of the use of full intelligence and power of volition, in her, as in the great Precursor, if indeed on other grounds it could be conceived that she could lack so essential a gift as this for her

immense and most rapid sanctification. Thus with her mental faculties perfect from the first, her soul absolutely free from the disorder and feebleness which come on all who are born in original sin, her lower faculties perfectly obedient to reason and conscience, with the most perfect peace and calm serenity reigning in her soul, which had been turned with all its powers to God from the first dawn of its consciousness, with the source of concupiscence that is, all inordinate appetite, entirely destroyed or suppressed within her, with an immense treasure of grace and knowledge, as has been said, and with a body fitted to be the perfect companion and assistant of her glorious soul in all its service of God, interior or exterior, Mary from the first moment of her conception was the most beautiful thing in the eyes of God of all that He had made. The graces bestowed upon her in the way of sanctification were so high, that though it was not in the abstract or essentially impossible that she could fail in her perfect service of God, because her liberty was not yet fixed to that service by that incapacity of deviation which is the blessed lot of the saints in Heaven who see God, still there was in her that impossibility of any offence of Him which was involved in the intense plenitude of the grace which inundated her soul, and which left no room for a thought or a choice contrary to the highest perfection and faithfulness.

Thus was our Blessed Lady allowed the immense privilege of giving to God her Creator and Redeemer from the first moment of her existence,

which was also the first moment of her consciousness, a most perfect and intelligent service. It was so with her Blessed Son, Whose Sacred Humanity was never for a moment unconscious or inactive in the praise and worship of His Father. With Him there was that fulness of grace which precluded the possibility of increase, and He was the author and source of grace to her and to all others. Whereas the service of Mary, like that of the Blessed Baptist, who from the moment of his sanctification enjoyed the like privilege, was beautiful indeed at the first and pleasing to God above the beauty of the angels and archangels, but could nevertheless increase and grow in perfection by virtue of her own increase in grace and in intelligence. Not that it could ever reach the perfection of the worship and interior activity of her Son, but that it could become more and more like His. It would have been an immense loss, in our way of reckoning, if our Lord had not begun from the first moment to honour and adore His Father, a loss to the greater glory of God and to us for whom His prayers and affections were offered. It would have been a great loss if He had not made, at the very outset of His human existence, the perfect oblation of Himself as coming to do the will of God at so great a cost to Himself, if He had not, at the first dawn of His Life as Man, taken us all into His Sacred Heart for the love of His Father, Who had given Him to us as our brother. And in the same way, though not in the same degree, it would have been a loss to the honour of God and to the interests of mankind, if our Blessed Lady had been denied the privilege of which we are here speak-

ing, as the corollary of her Immaculate Conception. After the homage of the Sacred Humanity itself, there was never homage paid to God so beautiful as that of the heart of Mary, and the giant progress of her daily advance in grace was all the greater for having begun so soon.

We thus see how all the graces which distinguish the Blessed Mother of God are founded on the Immaculate Conception, though under another aspect they all come from her selection by God to be the Mother of the Incarnate Word. The lofty ideas and language concerning her of which the ancient writers are so full, imply the clearness with which they held this fundamental doctrine. And we may expect to find that the certainty which we now possess that this doctrine was a part of the original deposit of revelation in the Church, may open the way to a more explicit and definite manifestation of other doctrines concerning her which are more or less involved in this, and thus herald in the coming of the time when her greatness in the Kingdom of her Son may become still more and more conspicuous and helpful to the Christian people.

CHAPTER III.

MARY IN THE WOMB.

It is well known that the history of our Blessed Lady, both interior and exterior, is not written for us in the records of Scripture, nor preserved for us by any authentic traditions of the Church. Many parts of it furnish us with one of the most beautiful instances that we possess of the working of the principle of development in matters of truth, as if it had been the purpose of our Lord to leave the children of the Church to find out, by their own diligent musings and considerations on the few facts revealed to them, what had been His dealings with this most beloved soul of His Mother, rather than to impose them as matters of faith and draw them out formally as revealed doctrines from the first. This may remind us of the manner in which He seems to have frequently dealt with the Blessed Mother herself, whose characteristic grace it was to ponder over the mysteries as they passed in a glorious procession before her eye, to compare one feature with another in the gradually unfolded series, and then to use the thoughts of her own heart, so full of Divine grace, to help her to conclusions as to the meaning and importance of what was thus made manifest,

and of all that it implied which was not made specially manifest. Unless we are mistaken, we have in this truth the secret of the whole interior life of Mary, as far as that life consisted in her own cooperation with the graces and illuminations which she received.

The subject of the present chapter is one as to which we have no single word of direct information in Scripture, and yet we conclude with great confidence that, during the months which she spent in the womb of her mother, Mary's intelligence and heart were fully alive and immensely active, in praising and adoring God, in thanksgiving, in offering of herself for His service, and in other interior operations of the mind and the affections. That is, we suppose that by an unusual gift her mind and her heart were enriched thus early by the use of their powers, and that she was thus raised by grace to a condition in this respect like that of our Blessed Lord when He was in her womb. We learn this truth concerning Him, not by any statement in the Gospel history, but by drawing a reasonable conclusion from the theological facts concerning His Person, which is confirmed positively by some words of St. Paul. The reason why we assume it as to His Mother will be seen hereafter. But it may be well, once for all, to say first, a few words which may serve as an explanation of the method here followed, which is neither new nor in any way dangerous or suspicious to Christian piety. Let us say what is to be said by way of answer to the complaint that these things are not related to us in Holy Writ.

Men are always fretting over the silence of Scrip-

ture, because they do not understand that its purpose, in the Divine counsels, is not what they suppose it to be, and that, on the other hand, there may be many Divine reasons for its silence on certain points. The composition of the New Testament, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, did not leave room for the revelation in its pages of all the matters which our Christian curiosity might wish to find there. The four Gospels were written each with a definite purpose and object, and are more or less confined to the history of our Lord's Preaching and Passion. This history is almost entirely external. It records what men like the Evangelists and Apostles could see and hear. The Acts contain but the shortest, though most pregnant, sketch of the prominent features in the history of the teaching of the Apostles, especially with reference to the first great change which was made after the day of Pentecost, in the admission of the Gentiles and the abrogation of the Mosaic Law as of any obligation on the Church. The Epistles are all incidental and particular in their object and contents, and the Apocalypse, though it contains so many wonderful mysteries of the future, or of the early history of the Church, was not intended to fill up any of the omissions of the rest of the Sacred Books with regard to the subject on which we are engaged. In one most signal instance, at least, it does fill up for us a blank as to our Blessed Lady, but this is not done in the form of a contribution to her history on earth. Another source from which we might have learnt a great deal concerning our Lady's family and early life, was cut off

when the traditions of the first Jewish Christianity were lost in the desolation of the Church of Jerusalem on the destruction of the national polity. But it may be well to pause awhile in order to dwell shortly on some considerations which may help to explain the silences of Scripture in general. We shall then be able to see how much there is to account to us for this particular silence of which we are here speaking.

We meet readily enough the objections which are brought by ordinary Protestants about the silence of Scripture on many matters which belong to the doctrine and discipline of the Church. It is not the way of Scripture to say twice what has already been sufficiently said once, and this answer applies to a number of subjects on which the Old Testament had been sufficiently explicit for all practical ends. Thus our Lord did not lay down in explicit terms the doctrine of the Resurrection of the dead as a new matter of revelation. He told the Sadduces that it was sufficiently proved by the words of God in the manifestation to Moses at the burning bush. In the same way we may account for the great silence of the Gospels as to the doctrine of Sacrifice. That doctrine has been universal among men from the first, and, moreover, it was taught to the Jews in the most precise and minute manner, descending even to the distinction of the various ends of Sacrifice, and the like, by the divinely authorized witness of the Temple services and the ritual obligations of the Law.

Again, we are told that there is no New Testament authority for prayers for the dead, which form a part, it may be said, even of natural religion. We answer

that the truth about the departed was believed, and the corresponding practice already common, among the children of the elder dispensation. When we are challenged as to the hierarchical order of the Church, the number of sacraments, the duty of confession for the remission of sins by absolution, and the like, we answer either that the books of the New Testament were not meant to give a code on such subjects, which was already in practical existence among those for whom the New Testament was written, or that the truths in question are virtually in principle enounced by our Lord Himself, as is the case with the duty of confession. We say that the whole living system of Christian organization was a matter which did not fall within the scope of the several Gospels or Epistles, even if there had not been strong positive reasons why Scripture should not be made the authoritative and explicit record of these things.

The tendency on the part of heretics and rebels against authority to use the words of Scripture against the Church, must have been obvious from the first. As Scripture was to witness to the Church as to her authority, and as to her teaching in most of its details, it was not to write out that teaching for any one to misunderstand or misrepresent at will. Moreover the doctrine of the Church was to grow in the Divine manner appointed for its growth, and it was to take the whole lifetime of the Church on earth to unfold it with full explicitness, in all its parts and developments, the time for which was to arrive for each part in the order arranged by God. Thus the old universal truth was to be unfolded in all its ful-

ness of inherent richness, sometimes by the process of conflict with the undying swarms of heresy, sometimes under the more gentle influence of the natural progress and instinct of Christian devotion. It would have been destructive of this provision if all had been set forth in full detail at once, before it could be understood. St. John says that the world could not have contained all the books which might be written about our Lord, and he is understood by some of the Christian writers to mean that if all had been written out at the very beginning, many facts and truths would have been proclaimed out of their due time, and when the world was not ripe for them, and would therefore have turned against them and rejected the whole system for the sake of them. Holy Scripture was to contain many things which were not to be seen in their full meaning till long after they were written, as the statement in Genesis on which St. Paul builds an argument for the doctrine of justification by faith and not by the works of the Law. But it was always also to have due regard to the minds and conditions of knowledge to those to whom it was immediately addressed, at least so far as not to put forward what they would take offence or scandal at, or what they might dangerously misunderstand.

There are two other reasons for many of the silences of Scripture which may be used here, as bearing more especially on the subjects which are now before us. The first lies in this, that it is the purpose of Sacred Scripture to leave many things unsaid, for a reason parallel to that which has been

already mentioned in connection with such matters as prayers for the departed, which are hinted at in the New Testament rather than expressly enjoined. The doctrine in which that practice was founded was in full possession among the Jews, and as the New Testament does not formally enact the Ten Commandments, so neither does it formally enact prayer for the departed, or again, recourse to the intercession of the departed saints. Something of the same kind is to be found in the recognition in Scripture, and in the system of our Lord, of the use of what is called theological reason as an instrument of truth. Our Lord did not draw out all the inferences and conclusions which are involved in the principles and in the precepts which He promulgated. He even complained of the Apostles for not using their understanding on such points, and the occasion on which He made the complaint was not one when everything was plain at first sight.¹ He leaves many things to the enlightened Christian reason, working out its results under the guidance of the Church. The Church was to have her office as to truth, which was not to be anticipated even in the words of our Lord. An instance of this may be found in His forbearance as to so much dogmatic teaching, which might have saved controversy in the Apostolic age with regard to the abrogation of the Mosaic Law. The conclusions of that question are, indeed, contained in the New Testament, because it embraces the history of the controversy and many of the arguments of St. Paul therein. But in those argu-

¹ See *The Training of the Apostles*, vol. iv. ch. xiii.

ments we see the constant use of Christian theological reasoning. This is the beautiful and fruitful instrument by the use of which the great fabric of the Church's system of truth has been brought out and organized. And what was meant to be the fruit of one holy instrument in this matter, was not meant to be the fruit of another.

There are many conclusions concerning our Blessed Lady which seem purposely to have been left for this, and the silence of Scripture concerning her is a Divine provision for its working. It was not that Scripture could not have told us all that was involved in the dignity of the Mother of God, or, again, all the truths that are wrapt up in the single Greek word in which the Angel is recorded to have saluted her as full of grace, or all the principles on which theologians proceed when they argue that whatever grace belonged fitly to her position in God's Kingdom must have been hers, or that any grace that is to be found in other saints must have been in her in a higher measure of perfection, or how reasonable it is to suppose that she must have been as like as possible to our Lord, or that it is equally reasonable to suppose that she must have a wonderful insight into the thoughts and feelings and designs of the Sacred Heart, and so with other truths. Many of these things are naturally conveyed to us either by that other great part of the Word of God which is unwritten, and recorded in tradition, or they were to form the proper and natural sphere for another instrument by which truth was to be ascertained better than from Scripture. For Scripture was to be read by good and bad, friends and enemies

of the Church alike, by the captious as well as the devout, the proud as well as the humble. The principles of which we speak are principles for the devout and pious use of the reason, working upon the facts and truths of faith. As to these things it is more blessed to know them in this way, than by direct teaching. As there are some that are blessed who have not seen, and yet have believed, so there are those of whom it might be said that they are blessed because they have not been told the truth, and yet have grasped it.

It is on this account that we shall use most freely in these considerations this instrument of theological reason for the elucidation of the history of our Blessed Lady, in all sobriety and reverence, under the guidance and according to the mind of the Catholic Church. But there is yet another reason for the silence of Scripture, on many points as to which we are inclined to crave for more full information, which is of a very different character. It is the reason which is implied in our Lord's answer to the question of St. Peter concerning St. John, "What is it to thee? follow thou Me!" For however beautiful must have been the external details of the life of the Blessed Mother of God, at Nazareth or elsewhere, and however great may be the delight which we are to derive from the knowledge of her virtues and ways when we come to the blessed home of our rest in Heaven, there is a Divine wisdom in the ordinance of Providence by which we are left so much in the dark concerning these matters, as also of the details of the Life of our Lord Himself.

We have already said that many things are rightly

left to Christian reason and thought in matters which relate to the principles and ways of the dealings of God and of the workings of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of the saints. We have a large store of information as to these, the accumulation of many ages, and it is well that we should use them. They are illustrations of the workings of God in Mary, drawn from His workings in the souls of others. We call it a large store, but it is but a ten thousandth part of what there is to know. But for other matters, such as the details and incidents of life, belonging to a class of facts into which human curiosity loves to pry, it may fairly be said that they are not likely to feed the soul more profitably for the great work of the service of God than other matters of the like kind belonging to the lives of ordinary men. Our Lord spoke almost sternly to St. Peter on the occasion of that question, not certainly because the future career of St. John, if it had been revealed to his brother Apostle, could have contained anything either disedifying or discouraging, but because He knew so well the mischievous effect of curiosity in the soul, in dissipating, weakening, unfitting it for prayer and heavenly converse, even when its indulgence is not accompanied, as it is most generally accompanied in its ordinary manifestations, with a secret vanity, or pride, or censoriousness, or a tendency to rash judgments and foolish speculations. In nothing is the silence and calm reserve and self-control, so to say, of Sacred Scripture more eloquent and instructive, than in the constant rebuke which it deals out to curiosity.

We have here two classes of facts with regard

to which we are thus losers, whether from the silence of the Scriptures or the absence of authentic traditions. It is well to distinguish these classes, because their respective importance is very different, and the means which we have of filling up the want are different also. What we should desire to know concerning our Blessed Lady, and also with regard to so much that concerns our Lord and His saints of the New Testament, comprises in the first place the external facts of the history, such as the details of the lives of the parents of the Blessed Mother, of the early years, in particular, both of our Lady and her Divine Child, and of St. Joseph, or, again, in the fact as to her life in the Church after the Ascension, and the influence which she exercised over the counsels of the Apostles, and the like. Nor have we any direct statement of the history of her passage out of this world. In another class altogether may be placed the dealings of God with the soul of His Mother, the successive enrichments of that soul from the treasury of His fulness of grace in the Sacred Humanity. The words of the Angel at the Annunciation tell us that she was already full of grace, before the Incarnation had taken place in her most chaste womb with her own deliberate consent. Yet these few words sum up, as we know, a whole marvellous history of Divine operations, in the results of which her own cooperation could not be without its part. As the history proceeds, it shows us incidentally the height of grace and perfection to which she must have been raised, but it gives only this incidental help in tracing it out. Notwithstanding this, the mind of the Church is full of conclusions and reason-

ings concerning this part of the history of Mary, which are inexpressibly dear and profitable to her children. They are found in the books of the strictest theologians, and the tendency, as the Church grows older, is strong towards the further development of what is called the Marian theology.

As to the other class of facts, which may be considered as mainly or entirely historical, we find ourselves in presence of several venerable traditions, some of which have been so far adopted by the Church as is implied by her celebration of feasts and anniversaries connected with and founded upon them. Such, for instance, is the tradition about the dwelling of our Lady in the Temple after her solemn Presentation by her parents when she was three years of age. In the seventeenth century an attempt was made to expunge this feast from the calendar, on the ground that it had crept in without sufficient authority. But the feast was almost immediately restored, and a holy religious who had exerted himself very much to obtain this restoration by collecting ancient authorities which indicated its antiquity, had the happiness of being called away to his reward on the anniversary itself.

If we are thus left with far less authentic information than we could wish concerning this class of external facts in connection with our Blessed Lady, we may console ourselves with the reflection that these are not, after all, the facts of the highest importance that relate to her. It would aid us in our contemplations, and furnish us with many most holy examples and manifestations of the wisdom and goodness of God in the conduct of the lives of those

most dear to Him, if we had all the facts of the history authentically established for us. But they might also have something of danger about them, and they are not so momentous as the interior history of the soul of this marvellous Queen. With regard to the interior history of Mary, it is not a subject that we have any right to pry into further than it has been revealed to us in Scripture, or as certain great outlines which belong to it are within the reach of the careful student of the ways of God in the sanctification of His servants. It is a subject which belongs to the theologian, and he can find in his favourite study more than one ray of light to guide him where all seems at first so dark. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception enables him to grasp with security the corollary to that doctrine, in the fact of the immense treasure of grace and spiritual gifts which was bestowed on her at the same time. The Life of our Lord shows us the truth that the highest homage that can be rendered to God by His intelligent creatures is that interior worship of the mind and heart, the will and affections, in adoration and oblation of oneself by way of sacrifice to His service. As it is reasonable to conclude that His Blessed Mother was to be like Him in everything possible, and as we have the instance of the anticipation of the use of the intelligence and will in the case of the unborn babe St. John, it becomes a matter of Christian reason that Mary also should have employed herself in the same holy exercises of prayer and contemplation with her Son.

But this, again, is not all we know. We must add to this the doctrine on which St. Bernardine insists

so strongly in the case of St. Joseph, that whenever God calls one of His rational creatures to any special work in His Kingdom, He confers on that person so favoured the graces which are requisite and convenient for the faithful and honourable discharge of the duties imposed. Then we have no difficulty in seeing how very magnificent from the very beginning must have been the graces bestowed on her who was to be the Mother of the Incarnate God. If we add to this the truth of the immense value in the sight of God of the interior life of the soul glowing with light and burning with love for Him, we are already far on our way towards the understanding of the interior life of the Bleseed Mother from the first moment of her consciousness, and of her capacity to offer herself, her whole heart and life and being, to Him from Whom she had received them.

In all these stages, therefore, of the life of our Blessed Lady we know certain things and we do not know others. We know what kind of life that must have been which was now led by her, whether in the womb of her happy mother, or in the years of her earliest infancy, even before she was offered in the Temple, and left there to grow up like an olive tree in the House of the Lord. We know that her mind and heart must have been entirely given to God, that she was occupied with Him day and night, and that her homage and worship must have been ineffably pleasing to Him, and the like. But we know none of the details of this interior life, this perpetual holocaust of love and prayer. It is the character and kind of occupation of the mind and heart in which she can be a model to us in our own interior

life, and in the devotion of herself to such exercises as the most pleasing possible to God. The subject matter of her prayers and self-oblation, the particulars of the heavenly converse which then began between God and her soul, are her secret for herself, and it would not have been according to the ordinary rules of His government of souls that these details should have been written for our benefit. Thus, to return for a moment to the subject of the positive Scriptural statements concerning our Blessed Lady, we see that they by no means exhaust the teaching of Scripture on the subject. Scripture contains many hints and much light which we must carefully use in application to her, though they do not occur in Scripture where it is directly speaking of her. And it must always be remembered that we have often to deal, in our meditations and contemplations on these subjects, with large ranges of facts which it was not the office of Scripture to record. It was not the business of the writers of the New Testament to chronicle interior facts, and to draw out in detail the wonderful history of the workings of the Holy Ghost in the Sacred Humanity, or with the souls of the Blessed Virgin or of the Saints.

CHAPTER IV.

BIRTH OF OUR BLESSED LADY

THE day of the birth of any human being into the world is always spoken of as an occasion of the utmost joy, a day to be looked back on with intense gratitude, to be celebrated by a yearly feast, as the true entrance on life, with all its powers, enjoyments, and prospects. But with us in our present condition, whatever may have been the intentions of God in this regard if the blight of sin had not fallen on us from the very first, the existence on which we enter on our first birth is one of so much unconsciousness, so much weakness, so much suffering and danger and incapacity of all true enjoyment, and of the exercise of any intelligence or will in the true sense of the words, that our first days in the world are rather occasions of joy to others than to ourselves, rather on account of the hopes and the promises which are born with us, than of any actual possession of the blessings which are contained in the marvellous gift of life. Thus we think on such occasions rather of that joy of the mother of which our Lord speaks so beautifully, which, as He says, makes her forget all the pains and dangers through which she has passed, the joy that a man is born

into the world, than of any delight or happiness of which the child so born is at that moment made partaker. But we can at least imagine that things might have been very different in this respect if there had not been over the children of Adam the doom which now actually hangs over them. We do not know how far the weaknesses and miseries which accompany and precede birth might have been spared to us, either in the case of the mother or in the case of the child, and it is certain that even in these there are considerable differences in different parts of the world and in different conditions of ordinary life. The refinements and luxuries and indulgences of modern civilization entail, both on parents and on children, a number of sufferings which are at least aggravations of the ordinary lot of humanity.

In the case of the blessed Anne, the mother of the future Mother of God, we know that the conception and the birth of her child had been most ardently desired by her, that she had suffered reproach on the score of her sterility, which was now removed, that she had been made a woman of prayer by what she had gone through. Thus the child born to St. Anne was not only what she might have been if these circumstances had been otherwise, but a child of intense desire and longing, the satisfaction of which must have made her birth the occasion to her mother, not only of any ordinary joy, but of the joy of a long tried saint of God when at last the fruit of her prayer is granted in some marvellous way, after it has long seemed hopeless in the natural course of things that that prayer should be so blessed. Thus we have the best reason for supposing

that this Blessed Child was welcomed into the world by the most intense joy of her mother and the blessed Joachim, even if they had no reason for knowing that she was to be all that God had destined in the execution of His great designs for the redemption of mankind. This is the least that can be supposed concerning her birth. But if that happy pair had further obtained any insight into the plan of God for their child, or even if they could merely have surmised something extraordinary to be in store for her from the circumstances under which she had been conceived and born, then we must suppose that their joy and gratitude to God far transcended the ordinary joy and gratitude of earthly parents, even the most grateful and faithful in the discharge of their debt of thankfulness.

It must be thought certain that they must have been very familiar with the prophecies which were the peculiar treasure of their house and family. Fallen as were that house and family in the social scale and in the consideration of the world, that fact could only make the descendants of the holy King more careful in the preservation of the promises made to him and to his seed after him, and among those prophecies they could not have been ignorant or unmindful of that which foretold the Virgin who was to conceive and bear a Son. Thus although all the mothers of Israel in those days desired children, that they might perhaps have a share in the bringing into the world of the promised King, there was consolation and joy also at the birth of daughters, especially in the royal house, because one of them was in the appointed time to become the Mother of the

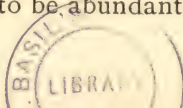
Messias. Thus it is very likely that there was this special element in the joy of St. Anne and St. Joachim, that the child of their prayers and their long delayed desire might be this chosen maiden, of whom Isaias had spoken, referring in his prophecy to the original promise made in Paradise of the woman who was to be the perpetual enemy of the evil one. But if they had received any Divine intimation of the destined greatness of their Child, that would give an altogether new character of deepness and intensity to their joy. And as we read of the mothers of many of the saints, that their children have been no burthen to them while they were carried in the womb, and that their birth has been marked by freedom from ordinary pains and sufferings on the part of the mothers, it is not much to think that there may have been something of this kind about the parturition of St. Anne. It is true that the immunities of the Immaculate Conception do not extend themselves to the parents of our Lady, and to their part in her conception. But it is also true that the common law, that women are to bear their children in sorrow and pain, is not always inflicted in all its severity on the mothers of children dear to God or on those who have become mothers under special circumstances of prayer and devotion and great purity of intention. So we may suppose that the childbearing of St. Anne was likely to share all such exemptions in a high degree, though it could not have by right the immunities which accompanied the childbearing of Mary herself.

These considerations may help to give us some idea of the depth and intensity of the joy of St. Anne

at the birth of her glorious child. But we must remember that the true joy which belongs naturally to such an occasion should be the joy of the child rather than of the mother. It is only because, in ordinary cases, the child cannot understand the blessing which it has received in being born into the world that the mother's joy is that of which we think first. We can imagine that, if it had so pleased God, children might have been born into the world in the state of innocence under conditions somewhat like those which attended the creation of Adam and the formation of Eve, in which cases the new being which they received was accompanied by the power of understanding what had taken place, and of realizing the blessings which had been conferred. It would not have been beyond the congruous harmony of nature in such a case, if the child could understand what a world of beauty and enjoyment that is which breaks upon him when he enters life, what lessons concerning God and His attributes and His character are involved in the simple opening to him of that kingdom of sensible objects which is manifested to his ken, the world of sight and hearing, and of the exercise of the senses, which have the mission of conveying the images of things outside us to the mind, there to become the food of thought and the vehicles of truth. The visible creation in all its beauty and harmony and magnificence and multiplicity is a book in which the intelligence is to read without end, and in every page and line of which there is some revelation of its Maker.

Moreover, such a child would find itself also in

another world, of which it forms itself a living and moving part, the world of humanity and of society, with relations and duties and occasions for the play of affection and charity, offices and bounties without end, a world the scene and home of its tenderest loves and closest ties, the noblest duties and the most fruitful services to its Maker. What a change from the confined and dependent existence which it has hitherto led, what a region of hopes and aspirations, of expansion of faculties hitherto dormant, of knowledge about God and itself and its future prospects, which even if possessed before is now acquired in a new way by the experience of life! The book of nature and of Providence open at a new page, an immense stride in intelligence and free action and consciousness of power and responsibility already made, and, by its contrast with the state which had preceded it, bracing up the mind to hopes of future and grander strides yet to be accomplished! The new existence is as a draught of the most exhilarating nectar, making the soul feel itself the mistress of a new and most glorious empire whose riches cannot be counted and to which there are seemingly no limits. What must be thought about the joy of the first entrance into such an inheritance, if only there could be in the soul at such a moment the consciousness of its gain, the intelligence of its dignity and its hopes for the future! And what would be the thankfulness and self-surrender of such a soul at seeing laid open before it the path of a voluntary and most glorious service to the great Giver of all these blessings, a service which is to be abundantly furnished by Him-



self with the means which it requires for success and fertility, and which is to lead to a still higher stage of existence in a region of perfect security and peace and of ineffable bliss, by the side of which all the joys of sense and intelligence that can here be known are as passing shadows !

We have seen reason for thinking that in the case of our Blessed Lady it may have been as with our Lord in respect of the perfect use of her intelligence and will, which had been granted to her from the beginning. If this were so, then we may suppose that the soul of Mary, when she entered this world as a child in the arms of St. Anne, may have been able to take in all that is contained in the gift of human existence. The soul of Mary was one most full of intense gratitude and desire to make some offering of its own in return for what had been given to it. Thus she may have poured herself out in affections of interest, joy, gratitude, and oblation. She may have entered this world, not in ignorance of all that was laid open to her therein, but as a Queen entering her palace, and delighting herself in all its treasures and in all the opportunities of beneficence which they afforded to her. All the more, if she understood, as is very likely to have been the case, that she was now made the recipient of still higher graces and favours than those she had received before, and of which we suppose her to have made diligent and faithful use during her life in the womb which was now coming to an end. For certainly the new existence which now dawned upon her required greater graces, as it furnished greater opportunities, and imposed more multifarious duties and a great

range of relations as the occasions of those duties. Thus it is reasonable to think that the birth of our Lady was among other things the occasion on which a still higher measure of grace was poured out upon her. This gradual increase in the great magnificence of God, drawing more and more largely on the unbounded plenitude of His resources, was to be the rule of all His dealings with the blessed soul of Mary. Thus the increase of her gifts, at this the first stage in her life since her Immaculate Conception, and consequent enrichment in the order of grace, was to be the precursor of many further advances of the like kind as the various mysteries of her wonderful life succeeded in due order.

CHAPTER V.

CHILDHOOD OF MARY.

WE all know that the character of children is manifested at the earliest age to those who study them and live with them, who catch a thousand little traits which would escape the notice of others. It is one of the delights of the young mother to watch this unfolding of character in her child. It becomes a greater delight in proportion as she is more tenderly devoted to the babe, has higher hopes and aspirations for him, and discerns, or seems to discern, the traces of resemblance to his father or some other near relative to whom she is deeply attached. If any child might have been expected to display to this loving motherly gaze the traits of character from the very beginning, it would naturally be one like St. John, or our Blessed Lady herself, in whom, by a special grace of God, the use of perfect reason and choice had been anticipated in earliest infancy, in whom therefore there was maturity of intelligence and perfect consciousness of the relations in which he or she was placed to God and to man. We have here something at least to guide us in our thoughts concerning the character of our Blessed Lady as it might thus have revealed itself to St. Anne and St. Joachim.

In the first place, whether St. Anne was conscious or not of the special graces bestowed upon Mary in her birth, we cannot doubt that the simple existence of those graces must have made her, not indeed unlike any other child in the manifestation of intelligence by speech or in any other way which would have made her infancy prodigious, but free from the pettinesses of temper, the waywardnesses of caprice, the silly freaks and wilfulnesses which have to be borne with in the majority of ordinary children. There are saints of whom we read wonderful things about their early fondness for mortifications and self-denials. This fondness cannot have been in them the fruit of any abiding elevation above the usual state of infant intelligence or choice, but rather of occasional impulses which may have been vouchsafed to them for particular purposes of God. Marvellous indeed is the mystery of the state of infancy, even in its ordinary condition. But the condition of Mary as an infant was not ordinary. She must have been a child full of holy joy and happiness, of love and charity, a child of calm and peaceful gravity and an angelic playfulness, of purity and meekness and tenderness to her mother beyond her age, as people might have said. This must have been the impression she may have given to those who saw her externally. Interiorly, we must believe that her soul was full of beauties known only to God, and that her mind and affections were continually at work for him. As St. Anne had borne her since her Conception with so little of the ordinary burthensomeness of children, so Mary grew on in the first weeks and months of her life as one might be ex-

pected to grow in whom there were none of the penalties of original sin to be found, and whose mind and heart were already opened to the constant showers of Divine grace, producing there, as in a most fertile soil, the perpetual harvest of holy aspirations and prayers. We see sometimes among Christian families children who seem to have no trace of what we may call natural malice in them, but on the contrary to be always moved by holy impulses, as we should certainly deem them if they were of riper age. Such children may remind us faintly of what St. Anne may have seen in her own.

Again, it is usual for the characteristics of the parents to show themselves in the children even from the beginning, though this rule is not of invariable application. It is the same with the lineaments of the face as with the more subtle features of the mind and heart. It is well enough to suppose that the mother of our Blessed Lady might have often rejoiced to observe that her child, the child of so many prayers, bore some resemblance to her own features, as afterwards it is thought that the features of our Lord gave back a perfect resemblance to those of His own Blessed Mother. But in the case of the character of Mary we may more reasonably presume that it was the character of Jesus which was as it were anticipated in her, rather than her character repeated in Him. The character of one who had the privilege which we suppose our Lady to have possessed, of being able to converse interiorly with God from the first by the perfect use of her intelligence and will, must have been very greatly moulded by the use of this privilege. It was the

centre and heart of her whole life and being, and there could have been no thought or action of hers which did not at least to the eye of Heaven reflect its influence.

But it was inevitable, both from the nature of the case and from the special vocation of our Lady in the Kingdom of her Son, that her thoughts must have been led principally, and by a special attraction, to the great attributes of God manifested in that greatest of His works, in which she was to bear so large a part and for which she had been called into the world, the work of the redemption and glorification of mankind by means of the Incarnation and Passion. She was not conscious of her vocation, but He Who fashioned her soul for this great work knew it beforehand, and prepared her for it from the beginning. We often see in ordinary children traits of character and taste which interpret themselves in after years, when they come to take their place in life. So it is reasonable to think that Mary's soul and heart flew by a congenital attraction to the mysteries of Redemption. This would make the interior acts of her will and intelligence as like as was possible to those of her Divine Son, when He dwelt so long in her womb, and thus the heart and mind of the Mother were formed and fed on the same contemplations and aspirations which occupied His own soul during the nine months. It cannot be wondered at if the character thus formed in her was shaped after the fashion of that of her Divine Son. We can trace in the very few notices which remain to us on this subject a great resemblance between our Lord's special characteristics

and those of our Blessed Lady, as for instance her extreme mercifulness, as shown in the marriage feast, which exactly resembles His anxiety lest the crowds should go home without food on the occasion of the great miracles of the loaves, and one or two other such occasions. But in truth we cannot prove this better than by the reasons which we have for taking it for granted that so it must have been.

Mention has been made of the feast of the Presentation of our Blessed Lady in the Temple. This gives liturgical sanction to the old tradition which represents her as taken to the sanctuary by her parents at the age of three years, in order that she might be brought up in the little society of girls who were trained in a kind of religious manner under the shadow of the sanctuary itself. It has been said elsewhere that there can be nothing unreasonable in this tradition in itself.¹ Nor can it be supposed a strange thing that St. Joachim and St. Anne should be willing thus to provide for the education of their child at a distance from their own home, which seems to have been fixed at Nazareth. If St. Anne looked with any peculiar devotion to her famous namesake, the mother of the Prophet Samuel, —whose canticle is used by our Blessed Lady in her own *Magnificat* in a manner which suggests the thought of its being a household song of thanksgiving in her family,—she would find there an exact precedent for the course which she is said to have taken in thus disposing of her own child. There may moreover have been special reasons in the case of the parents of our Lady for this course, and they

¹ See *The Preparation of the Incarnation*, ch. vi.

are supposed in the legend to have vowed to the service of God the child for whom they prayed so fervently, as was the case with Samuel.

But the truth which we have made the foundation of these considerations concerning Mary furnishes us with a further reason for the Presentation in the Temple, and the life of the child which followed on that Presentation. For if her mind and heart were to occupy themselves perfectly and continuously upon God and Divine things, and especially the mysteries of the Incarnation, it would be a most natural security for this great end that she should be placed under circumstances most fitted for the exercise of her powers, in such a way as should give the greatest glory to God and enable her to make the most rapid progress in the path of sanctification. But for this object there could be no better home for Mary than the sacred retreat of the sanctuary, where she would live among the praises and worship of God, close to the most sacred spot on earth, and be a constant attendant on the sacred services and sacrifices instituted for the especial purpose, among others, of preparing the minds of the people for the execution of the designs of God in the Incarnation. No doubt her soul might make much progress in the way of God in the quiet holy home of St. Joachim and St. Anne. But still there would be a calm peace, an unruffled security, an opportunity of the exercise of prayer and worship, in the Temple, which would not be found elsewhere. If our Lady had the privilege which we believe her to have had, it must have been, not an idle boon or a faculty conferred merely to do her honour, that she might not be

lacking in any gift which was bestowed on others. It must have been given her for use and for the especial purpose, as has been said, of her more speedy and singular exaltation in the measures of grace. And for this the residence in the Temple would be the most convenient and efficacious disposition.

It has been said that the truths which thus flow from what we may fairly believe concerning the interior graces bestowed upon our Blessed Lady are more important to us than the external facts of her history. There is every reason for thinking that the devout children of the Church have a perfect right to their belief as to the Presentation of our Lady in the Temple after she had been weaned by St. Anne at the age of three years. But even if this should be thought to lack sufficient authority, on account of the date of the legend in which the facts are embodied, it would only follow that we should not be sure of the place in which those years of her life were spent. But the truth of her continual progress in the use of her graces already received, and in the reception of fresh graces from the hand of God, whether in reward for her faithfulness or as given by His simple bountifulness for the sake of her Son, would not be in any way affected by the doubt that might be thrown on the history of her sojourn in the sanctuary. Wherever the early years of her life were spent, she was still the chosen Virgin whom we understand to have been conceived without the stain of original sin, to have received immense graces from the very first, and to have also received the power of using these

graces with perfect intelligence and fervour even from the very dawn of her life. Thus a continual advance, a constant multiplication of her interior graces, was the law of her life. External circumstances, such as the sojourn in the precincts of the sanctuary, would favour this advance in a very great measure, but they would not be its principal source and fountain-head. Whether at Nazareth or in the Temple, she would still be hastening on with giant strides to that consummate fulness of grace which she was to possess when the Angel was to salute her as the Mother of God.

CHAPTER VI.

MARY IN THE TEMPLE.

WE have now before us a period of considerable length in the life of the Blessed Mother of God, reaching up to the time of her Espousals with St. Joseph. We must endeavour to gather some general idea of the chief features of this important stage in her preparation for her high office, and in this we may be guided very much by what we know must have been the life of the chosen maidens, who, as there is reason to believe, were brought up in a small community in the immediate neighbourhood of the sanctuary, very much as young girls were brought up in old days, and may still be brought up, in convents of nuns in the immediate neighbourhood of some famous shrine or place of pilgrimage. Besides these general considerations, we must always keep in mind the peculiar graces which our Lady had already received as the sequel to her Immaculate Conception, and for the especial purpose of her preparation for her unique position in the Kingdom of God. The ancient traditions will also come in to our help, and by the use of these means we may derive a fairly ample knowledge of what her life at this time must have been.

In the first place, it is evident that the life of a little community brought together in such a spot, and under such conditions, must have been well ordered and arranged, the hours carefully distributed for a succession of holy duties, under the care of some grave matrons, watched over by the priests of the Temple. Religion was far more exclusively the subject matter of education among the Jews than among modern Christians, and it would be natural that, while the maidens in the Temple were not left uninstructed in all that would be required of them in their future life as wives and mothers and mistresses of families, they would be trained especially in the knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures and the Divine law. No happier lot could be conceived than that of these young maidens. The life which they led was holy in all its arrangements and spirit, and they had the most blessed opportunities for the exercise and development of their devotion to God and His sacred shrine. The Psalms,—particularly the fifteen beautiful songs which are called Gradual, and were connected with the services of the sanctuary,—show us something of the spirit of devotion which prevailed among the pious Jews, and especially they show us the intense love with which they regarded the Temple and everything that was connected with the national worship of the holy people. The Temple was to them the centre of all their most holy affections, the dwelling-place of God upon earth, the antechamber of Heaven. When we consider the glowing words of the Psalms and other portions of the Old Testament concerning the house

of God, and the love which those who used these sacred words bore to it, we are inclined to question whether the devotion of so many Christians for the far more highly favoured spots of Catholic worship either transcends the devotion of these ancient worshippers, or even comes up to it.

We have in our churches a far more Divine Presence than was to be found there. We have the only truly august and efficacious Sacrifice, and the effusion of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of the faithful makes a Christian assembly gathered together for the worship of God, venerable and holy and pleasing in His sight, and so the occasion of immense graces to those who share in it, as well as extremely powerful and efficacious in its supplications to an extent which could not be under the elder dispensation. And yet we cannot certainly outdo the ancient saints in their love for the house of God. It is easy therefore to think that our Lady burned with the most intense love for the Temple and all its holy privileges, and that she derived immense benefits, in the way of increase of grace, from her devout sojourn there, a ripening and deepening in all graces and virtues in consequence of the sacredness of the place which she so well understood, and which breathed a fresh and most powerful spirit of prayer into all who dwelt in or frequented its courts. And it is remarkable how this thought meets us again and again in the Psalms, and other such books, that the being "planted in the house of the Lord," in the courts of the house of the Lord our God, is the cause why the just shall flourish as a palm tree and shall be multiplied as a cedar of

Libanus. A part of the advantages of such a condition of life must certainly have been the holy example and sweet conversation of the devout people who were constantly to be met with in the Temple, and who would communicate to one another their fervour, their hopes for good, and their objects of prayer and holy interests.

It is not surprising to find, among those who have contemplated this part of the life of our Blessed Lady, the thought that thus early in her career she may have been familiar with the heavenly citizens themselves visiting her during her prayers. We find that when St. Gabriel appeared to her, charged with the great message of the Incarnation, it was not at the appearance itself that our Lady took alarm. It was much more at the magnificence of the salutation that her humility took fright. But whether or not the holy Angels were in the habit of making themselves known to her, we may be sure that she was all this time the favoured temple of the Holy Ghost, the great Teacher and Master of prayer, and that her life became gradually more and more absorbed in God. As the Holy Ghost was to form in her womb the glorious Body which was to be taken as His own by the Son of God, it is not much to suppose that He was occupied during these years of preparation in forming in her mind and heart more and more perfectly the image and idea of Him Who was thus to become Incarnate. Under His guidance she would soon enrich her mind with a perfect acquaintance with the Sacred Scriptures, in the study of which she would be led most of all to dwell upon all that related most directly to the

mystery of the Incarnation, the prophecies and types which foretold it and the like.

But it must not be supposed that the education of our Blessed Lady in the knowledge of the Scriptures was confined to any particular part of the Word of God, although all and every of its parts bore witness in some way or other to the mystery of the Incarnation. The treasures of Divine wisdom contained in the Sacred Volume could never have been more thoroughly understood and appreciated than by her. The great teachings about God's ways in His general and particular Providence, the historical unfolding of the principles of His dealings with nations and persons, the grand succession of saintly characters and examples, the moral doctrine of the Law and the Sapiential books, the lofty poetry of the prophets, the tender devotion of the Psalms, in which is revealed also in so marvellous a manner the beauty of His agencies in souls and His communications of His gifts and secrets to them—all these were constantly the food of her mind, and by them all her thoughts and judgments were coloured. It was the blessing of children well brought up that the Jews, even those of the dispersion, and in cases of mixed marriages, as we see in what St. Paul says of St. Timothy, that they were made to "know the Sacred Scriptures from infancy,"¹ and if there was this devotion to the study of Holy Writ in devout

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 15; see also i. 5. The two passages taken together give us a picture of a Jewish family, living in a heathen land. Lois had married her daughter Eunice to a Gentile, but the child of this marriage had been named *Timotheus*, and had been most carefully brought up in his mother's faith.

families everywhere, it must have been far greater where the young were brought up under the shadow of the Temple. When the Angel addresses our Blessed Lady at the Annunciation, he does this in the words of Scripture. His whole salutation presupposes in her the most perfect intelligence of and familiarity with the prophecies. When she breaks out in her own Canticle of praise, the thoughts and language are Scriptural all through. There are some of the Christian saints, as for instance St. Bernard, of whom it may almost be said that it is hard to be certain when they are not using the ideas and the language of the Vulgate. Something of the same kind might probably have been the case with the devout Jews of our Lord's time, and, therefore, pre-eminently with His Blessed Mother. There was no literature but this for such as Mary.

Thus it is fair to conclude that during her stay in these holy precincts her mind and thoughts became, so to say, saturated with Scripture, its views about God and man, this world and the next, the value of temporal things and of eternal things, what God had done for His people and what He was about to do. It is difficult to exaggerate the influence of such a knowledge of Sacred Scripture on good Catholic education, even in souls ordinarily good, virtuous, intelligent, and devout. But just as Scripture is so much more to a Catholic than to one who has not the key of the true doctrine of the Church to interpret it, just as, like all means of grace and stores of holy truth and strength, it imparts its grace and truth and light and strength and consolation and wisdom with far more efficacy and large-

ness to those who are the best able to receive what it has to give, so it must be thought that the Divine Word, when taken into the illuminated mind of Mary, conveyed riches and secrets of the wisdom of God which others could hardly receive. It is so with the ordinary means of grace. They are far more to the saints than they are to ordinary Christians. And if even to us the study of and familiarity with Holy Writ gives a ripeness and fulness of intelligence, an elevation of thought, an intensity and delicacy of perception as to the things of God, which are wanting in those who are so foolish as to neglect these inexhaustible fountains, it may well be imagined that the profit which our Lady derived from this common blessing was in a degree almost inconceivable.

It may be remembered also that she was now in the constant use of another great means of grace in being able to assist, at least to a certain extent, at the public prayers and praises of God which were continually offered in the sanctuary. Here again is a common benefit, which is open to all, at least, who have some command of their time. Until the majestic services of the Christian Church were made possible by the peace which she conquered by centuries of persecution, and the building and endowing of stately basilicas and the like, the world had never known anything more august, reverent, and worthy of the worship of God than the continual services of the Temple. Worship of this kind, again, has a great blessing attached to it, and it gives the peace, the confidence, the "princely spirit" of which the Psalm speaks, of those who feel themselves the

fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God, and who occupy themselves in the same holy functions of adoration and praise which are continually taking place in Heaven. A practice such as this strengthens them against a thousand trials, and lifts them above the petty troubles and anxieties of life, while at the same time it accustoms them to the affections of adoration, self-oblation, praise, thanksgiving, and the like, which are the legitimate tribute and homage to God from the intelligent creatures whom He has had the mercy to bring into communion with Himself. This of itself has an immense effect even on ordinary characters, and it may well be thought that it lifted the Blessed Maiden who was to be the Queen of Angels to a rapture of adoration which they themselves did not surpass.

We may say the same of that large and stately service to God which consisted in the sacrifices, typical and material as they were. Her constant presence in the Temple would be a lesson which Mary of all others would most perfectly comprehend, as to the significance of all the sacrificial and ceremonial observances of which the service of God in the Temple was in so large a degree made up. As the early Christians seem to have frequented the Temple in the first days of the Church, reading, through the material veils of the sacrifices, the continual pleading before God of the one all-sufficient Sacrifice of the Immaculate Lamb, so before the Incarnation itself there must have been many worshippers there who must have understood all the figures of the Law and its ceremonies as representations of the Sacri-

fice of the promised Redeemer, and in this exercise of spiritual discernment no one could have surpassed our Blessed Lady. And we cannot suppose but that the devotion thus called forth, even by those external rites, for the sake of that which they represented, pleaded, and applied, must have been rewarded by God with many great gifts of grace to such faithful and intelligent worshippers.

All these holy influences must have had their full and unimpeded effect upon this blessed soul, and they would certainly generate an ever-increasing love of God, especially in the mystery of the Incarnation and of the atonement for the world thereby, and also that which ever follows on an increasing love for God and for our Lord as Redeemer, namely, a great love of souls and zeal for their salvation and spiritual profit. This would also lead to the greatest possible circumspection and carefulness in her daily life, both in order that her prayers might be more perfectly acceptable to God, and also that she might be a help and in no case an offence or stumbling-block to others with whom she lived. These again are fruits of grace common to all good souls, but which must have produced in our Blessed Lady effects not attained in others.

It can only be a matter of conjecture at what time it was that the chosen Bride of Heaven conceived under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, the Divine counsel of chastity. Christian writers speak of this counsel as the special privilege of Mary, as one that had no precedent in the saints of the Old Testament, as if it were reserved for Mary herself to discern its beauty and acceptableness to God.

The chastity which had been in honour under the elder Law was the chastity of married life, purity before marriage and perfect unsullied faithfulness after marriage. Many had discerned the beauty of widowhood, the abstinence from second ties, but the loftiness of the life of perfect Virginity over the most perfect chastity of wives or of widows, had not been found out, at least it had not been set forth in any holy examples as worthy of honour and imitation beyond all other states.

Isaias had spoken of the everlasting name which was to be given to the eunuchs who are faithful in the observances of the law, a "name better than of sons and daughters,"² and elsewhere there are words spoken about the beauty of the chaste generation. But it had not yet been brought out from the depths of Scripture that there was here a principle of perfection which, after the example of the Mother of God had once been given, was to become so wonderfully fertile in the Church of good and perfection of the highest kind. We can only know that at some stage of these marvellous ascents of Mary in the knowledge and intelligence of the ways of God, this great truth dawned upon and took possession of her heart, that although the happiness of maternity was then the natural ambition of all women of the holy nation, because of one of them was to be born the promised Messiah, still it might be more pleasing to God and the rendering to Him of a more perfect and unalloyed service to remain His alone in the holy state of Virginity, and that in such a condition she might perhaps aspire to be, not the Mother of

² Isaias lvi. 5.

God, but the servant of the Mother of God. This does not imply that our Lady had not the intelligence of the prophecies which spoke of that most Blessed Mother as herself a Virgin. For to aspire to this unique and unparalleled dignity was far above her thoughts.

It could hardly be that a purpose such as this could form itself in the heart of our Blessed Lady without a consciousness on her part that it was something new, and therefore something that would require a particular grace and special external circumstances to secure its accomplishment. But holy desires that are inspired by the Holy Ghost have usually, either at first or in the course of their ripening into resolves, or issuing in execution, much difficulty to contend against, difficulty which requires fortitude and courage and perseverance and great trust in God in order to overcome it. The greater seemed the difficulty, the more need would there be of this solid and immoveable resolution. It is this which difficulties of this kind produce in hearts which are truly acting under holy inspirations, and well conscious that they have the will of God to support them in their holy designs. Thus it is natural to find that among the acquisitions which our Blessed Lady is thought to have gained during this important period of her training in the Temple, one of the most necessary was a certain resolute firmness in carrying out what she had learnt to be the will of God in this matter of her virginal purpose. Moreover, she is thought even at this time by some to have confirmed it by a solemn vow as far as her own liberty was to be concerned. For this

may have been another of the heavenly instincts which rose up in that favoured soul, that a good purpose, especially one which it might be difficult to accomplish, is best secured as to its accomplishment, and is also made indefinitely more meritorious and pleasing to God, when it is made the subject of such a surrender of our will in the matter as to make it impossible for us ever to retract it. The words of our Lady at the Annunciation, in answer to the Angel, imply a vow rather than a simple resolution. She thus shows the holy instinct from which all such offerings to God by vow spring.

These, then, may have been some of the chief elements of the growth of Mary towards the height of perfect fitness for her office in the Incarnation, gained during her residence in the sanctuary. As she grew in years she grew in grace. We can well imagine that there is much truth about the traditions or imaginations which represent her to us as most wonderfully attractive in personal beauty of a most heavenly and spiritual kind, such as to inspire in all who saw her the love of the ineffable purity which dwelt in her. Such a wonderful sweetness and charm in her external appearance was but the outward reflection of the interior beauties of her mind and soul. It may be that when this weary time of degradation and struggle has passed away, and we behold the souls of saints in their glorified bodies in Heaven, we shall see that the beauties of the soul are meant to be reflected in the body, which is to be a perfectly fitting temple and tabernacle for the spirit which dwells within it, not then as in a prison-house or at best in a disguise, but as in a home

which is a part of itself, and answers most perfectly to every thought and emotion and affection and to all the individual traits of the character of each. But, as has been said, Mary was moulded by the hands of God both in soul and in body to be the perfect resemblance, as far as was possible, of the Sacred Humanity of her Son, and this is enough to prepare us in her for some very transcendant degree of sweetness and attractiveness. For our Lord became Incarnate that He might win the hearts of men, and thus everything about Him always breathed, to those who could take it in, this design of God that He should be in all respects winning and sweet.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESPOUSALS OF MARY.

THE ways of God are marvellous, both in their deliberateness and in their swiftmess. He prepares His designs from eternity, then He matures them in time slowly and silently, and then, when the appointed moment comes near, He brings them about almost suddenly, and with great rapidity. We have been trying to follow in our thoughts the gradual preparation of the Blessed Mother of God for her wonderful position and work, and there has been no hurry or want of perfect deliberation about her course up to this time. All has gone on smoothly and quietly. The world has known nothing of the great work that was being founded in its midst. The very inmates of the sanctuary themselves may have had but little inkling of the beautiful growth of grace which had been proceeding so continuously and so secretly in one whom they saw constantly, and whom they must have noticed and admired for numberless graces of manner and conduct which she manifested, while at the same time her extreme modesty and love of retirement hid her from any attention which might have disturbed the work of the Holy Ghost in her soul. He had never wrought

at any other time so splendid and magnificent a work as that on which He had been engaged in the soul of Mary. But, thanks be to God, He never has ceased, and never will, from working out most glorious achievements of grace in the thousands of souls in the Church, in the Christian family, in the homes of religion, or in the busy world, wherein He sees His own treasures, and brings about His own triumphs. This is that work of His on which, as the Apostle says, the Angels desire to gaze. It is in the eye of Heaven the most beautiful and the most important affair that is being carried on in this poor world of ours, the work of the Creator Spirit "filling with supernal grace the hearts which He has created." And now the time was approaching, in the case of this one most blessed soul, for the great step in her onward career which was to change the whole current of her life, and affect the whole course of the Providence of God in His dealings with mankind.

Now the time had come for one of the swift acts of the Holy Ghost. Mary had reached the age, whether fourteen or fifteen as it may have been, which it was usual for the maidens who were brought up in the sacred precincts to leave that holy home for their parents' dwellings, thence to take their post in the condition for which they were designed, to be given in marriage, and become in due time the mothers and rulers of families of their own. She had grown on and on in the measures of her grace. But of the one thing which most nearly related to her future and to the plans of God concerning her, she had not the very faintest

thought or imagination, namely, that she was to become the Mother of God. She may have known the Scriptures perfectly, she must have had a gift of intelligence concerning the ways of God as there revealed which surpassed by far all the learning of the doctors who taught in the schools of the Temple, she knew all the prophecies, she had unravelled all the types, she understood that the time was at hand, according to the prophecies which treated of that point, such as the predictions of Jacob and of Daniel, she had been long accustomed to pour out her heart in the most fervent prayer for the hastening of the advent of the Messias, and she had often thought how she would delight, if such might be her lot, to see Him in the flesh, and perhaps to be the handmaiden of the glorious Virgin who was to be His Mother. She may have been familiar, as has been said, with the visits of Angels, and have conversed with these blessed citizens of Heaven about the matters on which her thoughts were for ever dwelling, on which her whole heart was bent. But never from Scripture or Angel, the roll of prophecy, or the lights breathed over her mind in prayer and contemplation, had she caught the most distant hint that she was to be that most favoured among women for whose appearance in the world she so ardently longed. Her one thought seems now to have been, how she could serve our Lord in the virgin state, with the love of which she had been filled by the Holy Ghost, He Who sows, as the Church sings, the "counsel of chastity" in the hearts of His beloved brides.

It was a feature in the prophecies, that though

the promised Redeemer was to come of the seed of David and to sit on the throne of His father David, there had never been any mention of any one who was to be His Father after the flesh. His Mother was the subject of prophecy, but nothing had been said of any one who was to be her husband. Commonly, we may suppose, people thought little about this, and expected the Christ to be born in the ordinary way. There was no room in the ordinary thoughts of men for any other anticipation. It was not yet thought of that a maiden could desire to remain in her virginal purity, to live among the people without the protection of a husband, and without the corresponding duties. God had His own reasons for hiding from His enemies, as the Fathers tell us, this part of His counsel concerning the Incarnation, and it was mainly by this concealment that Satan was kept in ignorance of the design by which our Lord was to come into the world as the Son of the Virgin. Mary had no plan of life sketched out for herself, beyond her one great desire. She left herself and her purpose, as always, in the hands of God. But this could not prevent the thought occurring to those who had the charge of her, that the time was now come for her to take the same course with other maidens when it was their time for quitting the Temple. It would appear certain that by this time the parents of the Blessed Virgin were dead, and she would therefore be under the charge of the priests who governed the community of maidens, and of her own nearest relatives who might be to her in the place of her parents. The Law provided carefully for such cases as hers.

We may take it for granted that our Blessed Lady would not in any way disclose to those who had the charge of her the desire which she had conceived of living a life in the service of God, and in the holy state of virginity. This was a secret which was altogether for herself and her God. The instincts of the saints lead them uniformly to be silent on such matters, and it was not till it was necessary that she should put the question, that she asked the Angel Gabriel how it was to be that she was to become a mother, pleading the difficulty of her virginal vow. It is not at all likely that she would have communicated this secret to any of those who had now to be the directors of her path in life.

The old tradition tells us that the priests collected all the unmarried men of her own tribe and family, and that out of all these so brought together as candidates for the hand of Mary, St. Joseph was chosen by a miraculous designation, the rod which he bore in his hand being seen to flower, while those of all the others remained as they were. It cannot be said that this pleasing legend rests upon any certain historical authority, and we may again remind ourselves here of what has been already said about the comparative unimportance of these embellishments of the story before us. The legend represents the truth that the hand of our Blessed Lady was of priceless value, and that the good Providence of God, Who had chosen her to be the Mother of the Incarnate Son, had also watched over her in this respect of providing for her, in a marvellous manner, the Spouse to whom she might with safety be confided. The incident of the flowering rod is found

in the account of the designation of Aaron for the office of the High Priest. But in any case we here come for the first time across the mention of him who was to be so dear to Mary and to her Divine Son, who was to have so blessed and lofty an office in guiding them and guarding them in their earthly course, who was to be raised to so high a level of sanctity by his constant intercourse with them, and to fill so magnificent a throne in the Kingdom of Heaven in correspondence to his services to them upon earth. While the training of Mary had been going on in the sacred precincts of the Temple under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, the same Divine Lover of souls had been preparing the great sanctity of Joseph in his quiet shop or cottage at Bethlehem. Now the time was come for the union of those two glorious lives, which had hitherto been flowing almost side by side along the course of perfection, without being conscious of the destination of God by which it was decreed that for the rest of their lives, and for ever after this life, they were to be inseparably one.

If the legend of which mention has been made be set aside for the moment, we are not thereby deprived of most sufficient authority for the Divine appointment of St. Joseph with regard to our Blessed Lady. It is well known that almost every possible opinion has been formed about the precise grade of their relationship, and as to the particular line of ancestry by which either of them was connected with their royal progenitor, David. But the result of the discussion seems at least to make it quite certain that St. Joseph and our Blessed Lady

were very nearly related one to the other. By some it is thought that he was her uncle, by others that he was her first cousin, and it is very reasonably thought that he was the person pointed out by the Law as her husband, on account of the fact that she was an only child, and the heiress of the little property which had been possessed by St. Joachim and St. Anne. St. Joseph was probably a few years older than his blessed bride, but there seems no ancient authority for the belief that he was at this time far advanced in years. As her nearest relative on the father's side he was her natural protector, and it is quite reasonable to think that, living as he did near Jerusalem, he had often visited her while she was in the Temple, and was a partner of most of her secret thoughts. He was the person to whom the priests would naturally turn when the time had come for bestowing her in marriage, and, according to the precedent of the daughters of Zalphaad in the Pentateuch, it would be a duty incumbent on him to become her husband, and so preserve the inheritance of St. Joachim in the family to which they both belonged. This seems to be the simple and natural explanation of the facts concerning the marriage of the Blessed Mother of God.

It has been said that our Lady would almost certainly be guided by the Holy Ghost to keep a strict silence with regard to her vow of virginity, leaving it to God to provide in His own way for the preservation of what she had promised to Him. But her new relation to St. Joseph would make it necessary for him to become the sharer of her secret, whether before the time of the actual

espousals or after. He had already, indeed, a sort of authority over her as her nearest of kin, and this alone would give him a right to her secret desire. It was now as it was afterwards with regard to the Incarnation of our Lord in her womb. Mary did not speak, but left to God the time and the manner of the disclosure. We may be sure that God did not disappoint the secret wishes of her who trusted herself so entirely to Him, and whenever, or by whomsoever, it was that St. Joseph was made aware of the virginal purpose of his blessed spouse, he was guided at once to give it his most hearty consent, and to join in her purpose as to the life which they were to lead together. The union of their hearts had perhaps been long complete before they engaged in this new tie between them, and their common desire to lead a life of the most perfect continence in the married state became a fresh bond of union between them.

Thus we find our Blessed Lady at the time of her espousals prepared by the silent action of Providence for her great office. The immense graces which she had brought with her to the Temple were now multiplied tenfold by the life which she had there led in prayer and worship, and contemplation, and the practice of every lowly and holy virtue. Besides this, there had been certain stages at which it is reasonable to suppose that she had received fresh outpourings of gratuitous graces from the unmeasured bounty of God. Such may have been in an especial degree the time at which she conceived her purpose of virginity, or when she consecrated that purpose to God by her solemn vow, and also

the time of her espousals, which were a great act of most prudent obedience and abandonment of herself into the hands of God.

We must here find room for another thought which naturally suggests itself with regard to this subject. It must be certain that in proportion as the instinct of silence fettered the speech of Mary and of her future spouse as to the great object of her desire, she would be urged by another most powerful instinct to the most earnest and fervent prayer for him on whose dispositions so much depended for the execution of this desire. It must therefore have been a point on which our Blessed Lady must have exerted all her fervour of intense and even passionate petition before God for the guidance of her blessed spouse, that he might have a great assistance of the Holy Ghost to breathe into him the same holy counsel of perfection which she had herself conceived by the inspiration of the same Divine Guide. The most reasonable conclusion at which we can arrive in this matter is that the prayer of our Lady was now poured forth with immense persistency and determination, and that St. Joseph obtained the great grace, which made him a worthy companion of our Lady in this holy resolution, by the working of the Holy Ghost in his soul, and that he was aided most powerfully by the intercession of his blessed spouse. We read in the stories of some of the Christian martyrs that they have won by their prayers the wonderful grace of conversion for their spouses, and also frequently the further grace of the holy instinct of continence in the married life. It is not wonderful that God should be willing to grant

so beautiful a grace in the case of such as St. Cecilia and others like her, or later in the history of the Church, in the instances in which husbands or wives have been persuaded by their partners to the observance of continency. Much more may it have been the case with the blessed Joseph, the appointed Spouse of Mary, for it was in the Providence of God that he should be chosen for this especial purpose that he might be the husband of our Blessed Lady, but that she should remain for ever a most perfect Virgin.

The many reasons for this arrangement are rehearsed by St. Bernard and others. But it is remarkable that St. Jerome tells us that the very ancient Father St. Ignatius of Antioch put forward especially the reason that it was fitting that the Mother of God, though a perfect Virgin, was still to be, to all human appearance, the wife of St. Joseph, in order that the Virginal Conception of our Lord might be concealed from the devil. It was not that our Lord could not bring about the designs of His wisdom without any interruption or assault on the part of the enemy. For of course His power was and is infinite, and no creature could withstand His will. But He preferred to act with the utmost gentleness and wisdom rather than by power, and to avoid rather than overwhelm the opposition of His foes. This is noticeable all through, that the enemies of God and man were caught in their own devices, scattered, as our Lady says, in the imagination of their hearts. For this reason the manner of the birth of our Lord from a pure Virgin was to be concealed from Satan, as well as for a number of most holy

and beautiful reasons besides this. Our Lord could certainly have brought about this arrangement in many ways, as by direct revelation to St. Joseph, as well as by the prayers made for him by Mary. But there is a beauty and fitness about the method which appears to have been chosen, that Joseph should owe the wonderful grace of resembling Mary in her love for virginity, to the prayers of his virgin bride.

The espousals of two loving souls who come together with a pure desire to serve God in the holy estate of marriage is always an occasion of most happy and holy joy to them and to their friends. And if joy can be conceived in greater and greater intensity in proportion to the greater and greater perfection of the two who are thus united, we can see that no joy on the occasion of earthly espousals could ever have been so great and so intense and so heavenly as that which now took up its home in the hearts of Mary and Joseph. The union between them was most perfect in every respect, and it was made far more beautiful and entrancing in its delights by the bond of the possession of this hitherto unknown purpose, of the life of purity in which they were to aid one another to serve God in perfection. No depth of love and sympathy was ever like that which characterized this marriage. They seemed to be at the end of their hopes for themselves, to have attained a height of happiness which could never be surpassed, and which could only increase in intensity as the years of their tranquil life flowed calmly on. And yet we know that this was but the beginning of what God was about to do for them, and

that, within a very few weeks of the happy ceremony of their marriage, He was about to work in Mary the most wonderful and the most merciful of all His condescensions in the carrying out of the Incarnation, in a manner which no mind or imagination of men or Angels could have conceived. He was to raise Mary to a position in His Kingdom to which there can never be any parallel, while her holy husband was to have his own great share in her work and in her exaltation.

Thus we may suppose the life of our Blessed Lady to have passed on for the first fifteen years of her existence. It had begun with the most wonderful outpouring on her of the special favours of God, Who had destined her from eternity for the highest lot that He could bestow on a creature. Each successive stage of her existence had been marked by fresh dowries of grace, in harmony with the conveniences and requirements of her office in His Kingdom. It is true that her own matchless faithfulness had corresponded perfectly with the blessings bestowed upon her, and more than that, she had received from the very beginning the capacity of using her graces with perfect intelligence and consummate prudence. Her life had been a succession of bounds onwards in His service, in intelligence, in fervour, and intensity of love.

It is possible that she was allowed to experience the trials which were to be usual in the saints who were to receive great gifts from God, and to occupy very high positions in His Kingdom, the trials of becoming the objects of the most intense malignity of the Evil One, who marks with especial hatred any

one who seems to be called to great favours from God. He did not know the secret of her Immaculate Conception, or of her marvellous elevation, of the special and unusual graces which she had received, much less of her great destiny in God's Kingdom. But he could discern that she was holy, pure, humble, fervent in prayer, and diligent in the use of the means of grace which were open to her. He could not but desire to spoil the apparently fair prospect of her sanctity, and his repeated failures must have irritated him greatly, and provoked his spite to vent itself on fresh and most malignant assaults, which were permitted by God in order that she might triumph over him. He could not reach to the disturbance of her interior peace, and he was obliged to assail her entirely from without. But this would only make him exert himself the more, to produce in her some fear or hesitation, or unfaithfulness of some other sort in her service of God. All, we may be sure, had failed. And now that she had become the mistress of a quiet home like any other bride of her age, it may be that he had relaxed some of his malice, and thought that there was, after all, nothing wonderful in her grace. For the crown and finishing bloom of the sanctity of this blessed soul was in a grace which beyond all others is pleasing to God, and at the same time utterly unintelligible to Satan, the grace of humility. This was a grace which, if he could have had before his fall, would have preserved him therefrom, and which, if he could have had it after his fall, would have been able to procure him pardon. But Satan might be, and was to be, humiliated continually

under the hand of God, the feeblest of Whose creatures were to be so strengthened as to defeat him. He might be humiliated, but humble he could never be.

In this, the favourite grace of her Blessed Son, Mary was next to Him, though equal to Him no one could be, because He in His created nature had the occasion and the ground for it which no one else could have, in that He had received the unique and unrivalled grace of the Divine union. In this grace then no one could be as Jesus Christ is, because no one could be so highly exalted and enriched by the free bounty of God as He. But next to Him in the scale of elevation, and next to Him in the scale of gratitude and humility at the sight of her elevation, and the free gifts bestowed upon her, came His Blessed Mother as she was so soon to be made, great in grace, great in the use of grace, great in prayer and the converse with God which had been her blessed occupation from the first, great in purity, great in fortitude, great in hope and reliance upon her God, great in the intelligence of the Scriptures and of the ways of God, in all knowledge and in all faith, and in all charity to others, and in all zeal for their salvation, great in all other spiritual gifts of every possible kind, but above all other graces and virtues and beauties and gifts, great in the pre-eminent splendour of her humility.



BOOK II.

MARY FROM THE INCARNATION TO THE END OF
THE HIDDEN LIFE.



CHAPTER I.

MARY AT THE ANNUNCIATION.

WITHIN a few weeks of the arrival of St. Joseph and our Blessed Lady at their future home at Nazareth, we must probably place the great central mystery of the Annunciation. It is needless to say that it would require a long series of treatises to unfold, even briefly, the various points of Christian doctrine which are involved in or dependent on the mystery of the Incarnation. Any attempt of such a kind would be beyond the scope of this work. It is enough for us if we can give ourselves some at least general idea of the graces and elevations implied in the part committed to our Blessed Lady in the execution of that great work of God, a part which constitutes the foundation of her singular and unparalleled position in His Kingdom. We must let these prerogatives of this Blessed Mother unfold themselves gradually before us, without pausing to give anything that might pass for a complete catalogue of them.

The Annunciation, as it concerns our Blessed Lady, presents her to us in a twofold light for consideration. In the first place it shows us very clearly though incidentally the great height and perfection of holiness which she must have already attained.

Her whole conduct and demeanour, her manner of meeting the singular and unprecedented circumstances in which she found herself, her silence as well as her speech, the words she said and what she did not say, her question as well as her answer, her hesitation as well as her joyful acquiescence, and her conduct as soon as the Incarnation had actually taken place, all these reveal her to us as an example of the highest and most absolute perfection in the various virtues which were successively called into play by the exigencies of the moment. It adds to this view of her most beautiful virtues to remember that the Annunciation must have come upon her with all the shock of absolute suddenness, and yet it found her most perfectly prepared. It was the most wonderful message that ever fell on human ear, and yet it did not put too great a strain on the depth of her Divine tranquillity. It demanded the most stupendous faith in the simple word of the messenger of God, and yet there was not the slightest breath of doubt on the spotless mirror of her assent. It tried her humility as much as her faith, it tasked her fortitude as well as her love for purity, it reversed all her plans and designs for the future, and set before her, a heart bent on self-abasement, the loftiest position that any creature of God could occupy. But neither the will nor the mind of Mary staggered or wavered a hair's breadth from perfect conformity to the will or the arrangements of God. Nor were hers the silence and prostration of simple bewilderment. She could pause to consider what sort of a salutation that might be. When the moment came she could put calmly her most pertinent question as

to the manner in which the mystery was to be carried out. From the beginning to the end of the dialogue, Mary is as much mistress of herself as the blessed Angel is master of himself.

The Annunciation also presents our Blessed Lady to us in another point of view, inasmuch as it is the central mystery of her life, the foundation of all her graces and all her dignity. It is this mystery which accounts for and is the Divine foundation of all the great privileges which theologians attribute to her. Not that many of these did not precede the Incarnation itself in point of time, but that this is the point and purpose of her Divine selection in which all other gifts whatsoever she received are included. All the praises and prerogatives which the saints have attributed to her are sufficiently explained when we remember her elevation in this mystery. Thus we find that the theologians who have set themselves to give an account of her greatness, frequently select this point in her life as the occasion on which to treat of them altogether. Their discussions take the form of a commentary on the Gospel of the Annunciation. Some have even said that she now received so much grace that she could not receive more. But in any case it is enough for us to remember that we have now before us the point in her life in which we may expect to find her advances in grace especially wonderful, and endeavour before we pass further to give to ourselves some account of the various privileges of which the saints speak. It is at all events certain that in this mystery she receives the highest perfection of her purity and closeness to God, as St. Ambrose tells us, the consumma-

tion of her Virginity and the fulness of her Maternity. This is the fountain head of all her other graces, whether, in point of time, they came to her before this or after this. The Annunciation thus looks backwards and forwards, to all that God had hitherto done for her and all that He was afterwards to do, nor is there any grace or glory or power that she has ever received that is not wrapt up in this.

These considerations must guide us in the thoughts which are to occupy us in the present chapter. Mary is now a wife, dwelling with her husband in the retired spot chosen from all ages by God for the scene of the Incarnation, the little house, as we believe, which is now the centre of so much loving devotion in the basilica of Loreto. The eyes of the world see in her nothing more than in any other humble and pure soul, devoted to her duties and to prayer, most sweet and gentle in her converse, gracious and affable, humble and obedient. In the eyes also of the enemies of God she was no more than others. At least Satan and his host were blinded by her extreme humility, and they had no thought that she might be the woman promised of old between whom and him God was to set perpetual enmities. For the evil spirits are not allowed always to use all their natural powers, either in prying into the secrets of souls and into the plans and ways of God, or in disturbing and annoying His servants. Though Satan may have been cunning enough to see something remarkable about our Lady in the Temple, he may have been lulled in a false security by seeing her married like any other maiden. If he had set himself now to watch carefully her proceedings, he

might not have been permitted to be aware of the dialogue between her and St. Gabriel, or if he was not entirely prevented from knowing what was passing, he might have been disabled by his extreme pride and arrogance from understanding it. Mary then was praying in her chamber, perhaps, as some of the saints tell us, pouring out special and most earnest supplications for the advent of the Messias, when the great light shone around her, and she heard the voice and saw the form of the Angel. "Hail full of grace! the Lord is with thee, blessed thou amongst women!"

The salutation included three things. First she was addressed as full of grace, then she was told that God was with her. According to the usage of Scripture this would mean that God was with her for some peculiar and special purpose. In the third place, she was hailed as blessed among women. This last sentence, as it were, qualified the sentence preceding, that is, it explained, in the language of Scripture, the purpose for which God was with her in this new and special manner. He was with her for some design, and to confer some particular grace, which was connected with the truth that she was blessed among women. Thus the two last portions of the salutation carried the thoughts of our Blessed Lady back to the Scriptures with which she was so familiar, and these would furnish her mind with the considerations on which she began to ponder in order to discover what kind of message or salutation this might be. Now the last words of the Angel were taken textually from the Song of Debhora, and are used there of Jael,¹

¹ Judges v. 24.

the instrument used by God for the destruction of Sisera, the captain of the host of the enemies of the holy people. As applied to Jael, they formed part of the long series of types and prophecies concerning our Blessed Lady herself which had begun with the first promise made in Paradise, and thus they would call to her memory the whole Divine order of prediction concerning the Messias and His Mother. Thus, in the beginning of this dialogue, Mary is reminded of the wonderful graces which she had received from God, and of which she could not but be conscious, then the Angel suggests to her that God is now with her for some further and particular purpose, and then this purpose is connected with the execution of some part of the great design of the Incarnation.

This is the simplest and shortest account of the contents of the salutation of the Angel, and it enables us to see the effect which it must have tended to produce in the soul of that blessed among women to whom it was addressed. It would certainly touch her humility to the quick, not by any sudden uncontrollable shock, but, as seems most probable, by the deliberate choice of her will,² as was the case with our Lord Himself, when it is recorded of Him that He was troubled or angry or sorrowful, and the like, when it is meant that He thought fit to call up such emotions in His soul and allow them to work naturally. Not that our Blessed Lady had the same inherent and perfect dominion over these feelings as our Lord, Who could not have been without it, but that having perfect freedom

² See Toletus, *in Luc.* c. i. ann. 74.

from original sin by special favour from Him, she may have also had by participation that perfect control over herself which He had by natural right. For that our feelings are not perfectly and easily ruled by the will is a part of the weakness brought upon us by original sin. If this be so in the case before us, then she chose to feel this kind of alarm and trouble on the score of her humility, as well as the awe, reverence, wonder, and amazement which so magnificent a message might naturally produce, or as some think, she might have felt it prudent to consider whether this great salutation might not contain in it something of illusion. For we know already that she was well practised in the warfare of the saints of God, who are continually assailed by all the cunning inventions of the enemy.

The next virtue which is displayed by our Lady on this occasion is her exquisite prudence, which made her keep silence and refrain awhile, thinking within herself, as the Gospel says, what kind of salutation this might be. Instead of leaping forward to grasp the great honour which was implied in such a salutation from a messenger of God, she measured it by her humility, and perhaps also by her love of chastity, which she may have thought would be assailed in the event of her Maternity, and proceeded calmly and deliberately to weigh the whole matter in her mind. Nor could the blessed Angel be indignant or be inclined to rebuke her, as he had had to rebuke St. Zachary, because it must have filled him with admiration and thankfulness to see God honoured by so much prudence and consideration, with which those helps and provisions for per-

fection in His service which are given to us in this valley of misery were so devoutly and faithfully used.

Thus the silence of our Blessed Lady was an invitation to the Angel to speak again. He began by bidding her have no fear. Fear is a natural feeling in any human being at the presence of a visitant from the other world. But besides this, there might have been other causes for fear in the case before us. Mary might fear delusion, and she might be frightened in various ways at the contents of the message. But she was not to fear, because she had found grace with God. A visit from God unaccompanied by grace would be a cause for intense fear. But when He visits in love and favour, grace accompanies the visit as well as precedes it. The grace which Mary had found was twofold. She had been chosen by the free decree of God to be His Mother, and with the choice and the decree had come to her, or would come, the grace and strength and light and courage to accomplish, faithfully, perfectly, and successfully, the great task laid upon her. She need not fear, therefore, at the thought of so great a dignity, since the strength and grace which it required were ready. It was the will of God, and the will of God is enough.

The first speech of the Angel had not gone beyond the declaration that Mary was blessed among women. To one so perfectly conversant with the Scriptural prophecies, these words of themselves would seem to contain the proposal of the Incarnation in her womb, or by means of her. For it was to the Mother of God that the title blessed

among women naturally belonged, in a manner in which it could apply to no one else. St. Gabriel had said no more, just enough to convey to her what was meant. We may certainly suppose that our Lady understood his meaning, and that her intelligence of it was an element among others in the necessity that she had felt for deep pondering and examination. But in his next words the Angel builds up, as it were, on the foundation he has laid. He carries the revelation of the purpose of God very far indeed beyond the first lines, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bear a Son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His Father David, and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever, and of His Kingdom there shall be no end."

It is now then distinctly said that Mary is to become the Mother of a Son. She is to conceive in her womb, and to call His name Jesus. But the virginal character of the Conception is distinctly guarded, first, in the omission of all reference to her husband, as it was usually said in such announcements that the mothers should bear issue to their husbands, and again in the declaration that she is to call her Child by this name, whereas the giving of the name would belong naturally to the father. In this case the language is so arranged that the father's part is, thus far, excluded in the last sentence as it is omitted in the first. For our Lord was certainly to have no earthly father in the ordinary sense, and He was to be so entirely and exclusively

the Child of His Mother, that in her was vested the whole parental authority by virtue of which the name was to be given. Up to this, the revelation as to this point is negative, as if the Angel had been instructed by no word of his to wound the virginal intentions and rights of the Blessed Mother.

What is most remarkable about the arrangement of the remainder of the sentence, is the completely Scriptural and prophetic character of the language. It has been said that our Blessed Lady must be supposed to have been most deeply versed in the knowledge of the Scriptures, which, together with the sacrificial and liturgical system which was in full working in the Temple, must have been the great subject of her study while she was living in that holy retreat. The words of the Angel here would show how perfect was her knowledge. For as, if an Angel were to address a saint in English or French or Italian, it would be a sign that that was the language native and familiar to the person so addressed, so when a messenger from Heaven addresses any one throughout in the words of Scripture, it is a sign that these words, and the whole region of thought to which they belonged, were most familiar to that person. Our Lord is here spoken of, first as the Redeemer of the world, for that is conveyed in the name Jesus, as when the same name is afterwards revealed to St. Joseph it is said, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." In the next place, our Lord is spoken of as great, and as the Son of God, and as to be known and honoured as such. For when it is said He shall be great, and shall be called

the Son of the Most High, the second verb is not simply a variation of the former, but it implies that He shall be called by men, and therefore be known to be the Son of the Most High. It may perhaps be thought that the name "Son of the Most High" does not in itself convey the idea of the Incarnate Son of God, because it is said of the saints, in the Psalms, "I have said ye are gods, and are all of you the sons of the Most High."² But the whole context shows that the Angel is using words which are to be understood in the highest and fullest sense of which they are capable, and that it would be falling beneath that sense to consider that he speaks only of one of the adopted sons of God. Our Lord is to be great, in the true sense, in which God alone is great, and in which in His Human Nature our Lord partakes of the greatness which belongs to Him in His Divine Nature.

In the same, that is, in the highest sense, the name of the Son of the Most High is to be understood. It is true that in this part of his message the blessed Angel does not speak of the Conception by the Holy Ghost in the womb of our Blessed Lady, for this is reserved for the next speech, which he is to make in answer to her own question, that the great revelation may be elicited by her rather than forced upon her, and that the beautiful order of the gradual manifestation may prevail throughout. Moreover, in this speech the Angel uses the language of the prophets, and the mystery of the Conception by means of the Holy Ghost was, as it has been said, to be first made manifest to the Blessed Mother

² Psalm lxxxi. 6.

herself. Thus there can be no doubt that the third speech of St. Gabriel puts forward the doctrine of the Divine operations in the Incarnation with a fulness and clearness of its own. The references in this second speech, as has been said, are all to the prophets, and the promises made by them. "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David His Father, and He shall reign over the House of Jacob for ever, and of His Kingdom there shall be no end." Thus this announcement gathers up the promises made at various times to David and his seed. For in them were contained all the former prophecies, as those which promised that the line of the Messiah should be in Juda, and Jacob, and Isaac, and Abraham, and as these again were but the echo and unfolding of the still earlier predictions made to Noe or Seth, and Adam and Eve.

But although the language of the Angel in this his second speech to our Blessed Lady, must be considered as being chosen on account of the prophecies which it repeated and summed up, it is still worthy of notice that the words should be so chosen as to put before her mind the kingly office of our Lord in particular. We can thus arrive at the truth, that it is especially as the King of men, the Heir of the throne of David, Who is to rule in the House of Jacob, that is, in the chosen people of God, the true Israel, that our Lord is presented to us at this stage of the Annunciation. For as Man He is the King of the whole creation, and especially of the human world. He is a King by

inherent and personal right, with a dominion and ownership as tangible and immediate as was the dominion of David, or of any other king of the land by which He was connected with David, and it is this feature in the Incarnation which is pressed upon His Blessed Mother at this time. The difference between the royalty of our Lord and that of any other king which is drawn out by the Angel, consists in the point of its duration. He is to reign in the house of Jacob for ever, and of His Kingdom there shall be no end. His Kingship therefore is the final accomplishment of the promise, and He can have no successor, as those who had gone before Him on the throne had their successors, because His throne is for ever and ever. Earth will pass away, and the generations of men in His Kingdom will succeed each, in its turn, until the end of the world, but His Kingdom will not pass away, because after the restitution and renovation of all things, it will still abide in its perfection of all power and glory. This, then, distinguishes our Lord from all successors of David, and distinguishes His Kingdom from all the transitory empires of the world, that of His Kingdom there shall be no end.

No one so well versed as our Blessed Lady in the prophecies and anticipations of Scripture could doubt for a moment as to the import of this great announcement. It implied that she was to become the Mother of the Messias, the Incarnate God. There had been no mention made of the manner in which this mystery was to be brought about. Nothing had been said, and the silence had covered some points which might otherwise have been

mentioned, if it had been determined that the Conception of the Child was to take place in the ordinary way. But this was not enough for the instruction of Mary. As long as there was no positive intimation of some new and extraordinary manner, there might still be a fear that something might possibly be meant which might interfere with the perfect preservation of the chastity which she had promised to God. Here there was occasion for her to speak, and this, in her exquisite prudence and equally great love for her vow, she did in the simplest words, saying nothing at all either about the greatness of the elevation which was offered to her, or about the great strain upon any faith not so mighty as her own implied in the marvellous character of that elevation. She simply asks the manner of the proposed Conception in her womb, for it cannot be, she humbly says, in the ordinary way. "How shall this be done, seeing I know not man?" She could not be ignorant that the first parents of the human race had come into the world in a manner different from all their children, nor could she set any limits to the power of God in carrying out His own designs. But by man it could not come about, since that was precluded by her vow.

There might have been more than one hint, obvious to a mind like hers, by which she might have divined from the Sacred Scriptures that the Holy Ghost might work the wonder. But this would involve a new and unheard of condescension, which could not be assured without a distinct revelation. How then was this to be, seeing she knew not man?

Thus, in these first recorded words of our Blessed Lady, we have an evidence of her intense love for purity, of her prudence, of her wonderful faith, and at the same time of her modesty and humility and obedience. For when she asks how is it to be done, she implies that same perfect surrender of herself to the will of God in all things, which was afterwards more fully expressed in her second speech, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." This shows us that she considered her vow as something which belonged to God, a pledge which He had accepted, and which He would certainly preserve unbroken, whatever might be the marvels required for the execution of His great design in a new way.

The third speech of the Angel is remarkable as leaving the ground of prophecy and opening an entirely new revelation to the Blessed Mother of our Lord. It has already been said that the Conception by the Holy Ghost was not one of the features in the revelation concerning the Incarnation as it had been already made. The doctrine of the Ever Blessed Trinity itself was not known to the Jews with anything like the fulness in which it is now presented to Christian faith. To say this is the same thing as to say that the whole doctrine of the Third Person in the Godhead must have been far less fully possessed by them than that concerning the Eternal Father and His only-begotten Son. It is not, therefore, unreasonable to look upon the Annunciation as marking a great onward step in the manifestation of the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, and especially of the doctrine concerning the Holy Ghost, as if this great and

marvellous work of His, by means of which the Incarnation was carried out by the Conception of our Lord in the womb of His Mother, was to be made the occasion of a more direct manifestation of His Person. At the same time it was most fitting that this feature in the mystery should be first of all made known to her in whom the Conception was to be wrought. In any case, we have in these words of the blessed Angel a great advance on the language of the Old Testament concerning the manner of the Incarnation.

“And the Angel answering said to her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee, and therefore also the Holy which shall be born in thee, shall be called the Son of God.” These words form the divinely appointed answer to the question of our Blessed Lady, and they therefore contain the revelation of the manner of the Conception in her womb. “How shall this be done, seeing I know not man?” It shall be done in this way, that “the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee,” and the rest. The Holy Ghost, therefore, was to come to Mary for the purpose of bringing about in her this miraculous Conception. When He is said to come to any with whom He is already by His presence in grace, it is meant that He comes with a fresh array of graces, for the purpose of the particular work for which He comes. In this case it was for the purpose of the further and final sanctification of our Blessed Lady, by which she was made fit for her part in this mystery, that is, to minister of her most pure blood for the formation of the Body of our

Lord. The Holy Ghost was to sanctify also the Conception itself, to form our Lord's Body, and prepare it completely in every way for the infusion of the Soul which God was to create, that the Soul and Body together might be united to the Eternal Person of the Word. All this is conveyed by the words, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee."

The words which follow, "the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee," and the rest, convey the further specific truth that the Child thus conceived was to be the Person of the Son of God in human nature. For it is possible that a miraculous Conception might have been brought about by the Holy Ghost, in which the Body and Soul would not have had that Divine Personality. And the last words sum up the whole effect of the operation of the Holy Ghost, and of that work of Power of the Eternal Father by which the Hypostatic Union was made. From these together issues the Incarnation of the Son of God. "Therefore it is that the Holy which is born in thee, that is formed in thee in perfect Manhood from the very beginning, shall be called, that is, shall be and shall be known to be, the Son of God."

Before speaking of the perfect faith and obedience which are the virtues which shine out most conspicuously in our Blessed Lady's reception of this magnificent revelation, it is natural to add the other words of the Angel, though they refer to a different subject. It is found in other such revelations that some proof or sign is frequently either asked or given, by means of which the certainty of the truth which is revealed may become more secure in the mind to which the communication is made. Some-

times the sign is asked, sometimes it is offered. But it seems as if it were a kind of rule in such cases, that it should be given. In the case of our Blessed Lady, she did not need anything more to make her grasp, with the most perfect faith, the truth proposed to her, than the proof contained in the fact that the communication was made by an angel of God. Although the truth set before her so far transcended any other revelation that had ever been made, and although it had about it all the difficulty which besets revelations which concern most intimately the person to whom they are made—for humble and holy persons are more ready to believe such things of others than of themselves—still her faith was equal to the demand made upon it. She did not therefore ask for or require any sign. But what she did not ask for was given to her, not so much for the confirmation of her faith in its intrinsic strength and perfection, as for its confirmation by tidings of joy concerning another great mercy of God, in the same kind as that vouchsafed to herself, and also in order that an intimation of the will of God as to her immediate conduct might be conveyed to her.

Before, therefore, Mary gave her most joyful and most humble consent to the execution of the mystery on herself, the Angel added the tidings concerning the conception of the Blessed Baptist in the womb of St. Elisabeth, a conception not so utterly supernatural as that of our Lord, but still impossible in the ordinary course of nature. “And behold thy cousin Elisabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren, because no word shall be

impossible with God." These last words, again, presuppose in our Blessed Lady a perfect acquaintance with the Sacred Scriptures. For they are a quotation of the words used to Sara when she hesitated to believe the declaration that she was to bear a son in her old age,³ and thus they bring again before the mind of Mary the whole series of such marvellous conceptions in the history of the holy people, all of which had been in some sort predictions of the miraculous Conception of our Lord, which was thus shown to be the accomplishment and final crown of a long range of such mercies. Thus, before the Incarnation had taken place, our Blessed Lady was furnished with the line of conduct which she was to pursue after it had come about, in going on her errand of charity to console St. Elisabeth, and bring about the sanctification in her womb of her unborn child.

It must always be remembered that all these marvels which are spoken of in the words of the Angel might have been brought about by an act of the Divine Power alone, and without any consent or consciousness on the part of our Blessed Lady. When Eve was formed from the side of Adam, he was not informed beforehand of what was to take place, nor was his consent asked. He was not informed beforehand because his consent was not required. But in the execution of the decree of the Incarnation God proceeded in a different way, not by the use of the power of His Majesty, but by the gracious sweetness of His condescension and reverence for His creature, so informing beforehand our

3 Genesis xviii. 14.

Lady of what He was to do, as to make the performance of this great work an act in which she had her part, by her perfect and ready submission, by a voluntary act of her own will, which was in itself ineffably beautiful and meritorious. All through this scene of the Annunciation, Mary is acting according to the instincts of her most consummate prudence, purity, humility, and charity, and the virtues which she has exercised all through are crowned and surpassed in their merit by the perfect oblation of herself which is expressed in her last words, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word." Thus she appears to ground her consent to the proposal of the Angel on the will of God her Lord and Master, though it was for her the highest of exaltations, the most sublime of dignities, the greatest of joys. It was all these, but it was these because it was the will of God, Whose handmaid she was, and her words imply that if the message had contained abasement instead of exaltation, and humiliation instead of dignity, it would have been the same to her, because it was the word of her Lord. And indeed, perhaps, even then, that most blessed soul, in her contemplation on the prophecies, may have discerned that as the Christ was certainly to suffer, so the dignity of being His Mother could not but bring with it a chalice of suffering to herself. And the words in which she signifies her acceptance are the largest possible, "Be it done to me according to thy word." Whether she had divined it or not, understood it or not, exactly all that was contained in the terms of the message which conveyed to her the intimation of

God's will, that she wished to be done to her. These considerations must suffice to set before us the first of the two points of which mention was made at the outset of this chapter, namely, the wonderful sublimity of the grace and merits of our Lady before the great mystery took place. It is certain that the perfection of her virtues as here displayed must have won for her, according to the ordinary rules of the distribution of grace, a most marvellous confirmation and increase of all that she had already received. But, besides this, as at this moment the dignity of the Motherhood of God was actually conferred upon her, it is equally reasonable to suppose that the collation of this dignity brought with it immense gifts, in keeping with all the elevation which it implied, and all the offices to God, to our Lord, and to mankind which it involved.

Immediately on the words of Mary followed the accomplishment of the Incarnation. All came about as the Angel had said. The Holy Ghost formed the Body of our Lord out of her blood. His Soul was created by the operation of the Divine Power, the Soul and Body were at once united one to the other, and the Divine Person of the Word of God took to Himself the Sacred Human Nature thus produced. In that most absolute silence of the night, in the little chamber of the cottage in front of the cave where Mary dwelt, with no pomp or visible manifestation by which the creation might know what was being done, the greatest act of the power and mercy of the Creator was accomplished. In a moment God had become Man, and the whole universe was renovated and elevated by His Presence.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus began to beat, the homage of the Incarnate Son rose up to the throne on high, —a homage worthier of the majesty of God than the adoration of a thousand worlds, summing up in itself and adorning with its own beauty and merit the worship of creation. Who can count up the difference between the world with Jesus Christ, and the world without Him?

It is by this measure that we must give an account to ourselves of the elevation which came at the same moment to the Blessed Virgin, who had been chosen as the instrument of this ineffable condescension. We have seen how great Mary was in the designs of God and in His prediction of the coming mercy on the race of men. We have traced her from the wonderful grace of the Immaculate Conception and the accompanying gifts bestowed on her soul, the anticipation in her case of the power of using her faculties and graces, the capacity of working, always with perfect meritoriousness, through her life in the womb of Anne to her birth, her childhood, her education and training in the Temple, on to the dedication of herself by her vow to God and her final preparation for her office as His Mother in the mystery of her Espousals. In the dialogue of the Annunciation she has manifested the most perfect virtue, the most consummate intelligence and prudence, and, after receiving with calm tranquillity the most startling message, and taken in with unshaken faith the most stupendous revelations, she has said the word on which the execution of the great Counsel of God was made to depend. She has mounted up ever higher and higher, until the magnificence of her

beginning seems dwarfed by the majesty which she has now reached. But the moment of the Incarnation, as it was like no other moment in the past history of the creation, and as its effects changed and left their stamp on the whole future of that history, so was it unlike any other moment in the series of the ascensions of Mary, a moment the results and fruits of which in her were to last on for ever. When Jesus Christ ceases to be Man as well as God, then will Mary cease to be the Mother of God, and when the fruits of the Incarnation are wiped out of Heaven and earth, then will the effects of the exaltation of Mary fade away from her.

This, then, which is the central moment in the history of God's dealings with His creatures, is naturally the central moment also in His dealings with His Mother. All that has gone before has been only her preparation for that dignity. At this moment that dignity is hers, never throughout eternity to be taken away from her. It is natural that we should try to give to ourselves some account of what is contained in the truth. Let us take the catalogue of her privileges as they are counted over for us by the saints, and see how they all depend on this one fundamental grace of her selection for the Divine Maternity.

The immunity from original sin, the sanctification of her soul which accompanied her Immaculate Conception, the acceleration of her power of knowing and loving and acting meritoriously, the graces she had received at her birth and during her childhood, have been already mentioned as given to her as the preparation for this crowning grace. Now, then,

she is the Mother of God. She is made, in the first place, a Mother in a new and unheard of way, a way which preserves to her the glory of her spotless Virginity, together with the fruitfulness of Maternity. Thus she is Virgin and Mother at the same time, a Virgin beyond compare, in the beauty of her purity, which was not a negative beauty only, but the beauty of the closest union with the ineffable purity of God, and a Mother beyond compare in her fruitfulness, which germinates no less a treasure than the Incarnate God Himself.

It must, moreover, be remembered that far more is meant when Mary is called the Mother of God, as to her relations with her Son, than could be the case as to the same relations in ordinary cases. The Son Who was conceived in her womb was from the very first instant of His Conception perfect in His Manhood as in His Godhead. We know that He could not but have had, from the first, that complete and uninterrupted use of all His inherent faculties and powers, which we suppose to have been imparted to His Mother when she was a child, for the more rapid advance of her sanctity, and for His sake. This must have materially influenced and coloured her relations and intercourse with Him from the very beginning. It may be that we cannot produce any certain proof that the heart of His Blessed Mother was enabled to converse with Him intelligently while He was in her womb, although, if St. Elisabeth could understand the joy of St. John while he was yet unborn, it might seem in accordance with theological reason to conclude that our Lady had the same or

a higher and more continual privilege. But in any case the relations between our Lady and her Son were intimate, loving, intelligent in a degree which could exist in no other case, because they were each capable of more perfect and penetrating intimacy, more tender love, more entire sympathy of heart and of mind than any other souls that have come from the hands of the Creator. Thus her Maternity must have been a greater and tenderer Maternity than any other, and His relations to her as her Son were in a like manner most perfect in their kind. And the ties between the parent and the child are ordinarily more or less limited to the affections and mutual services of this life, whereas the Motherhood of Mary and the Sonship of our Lord were from the beginning realities which belonged to the eternal Kingdom of God, they have remained in Heaven as on earth, they are active and operative now as of old at Nazareth, and thousands and thousands of mercies and wonders in the realm of grace are continually issuing from them.

Many of the saints are fond also of the contemplation which dwells on the relations which were begun at the moment of the Incarnation between our Blessed Lady and the Persons of the Eternal Father and of the Holy Ghost, and these also are relations which did not end with the accomplishment of the mystery, but live on in all times in the Kingdom of Heaven. As our Lord is the Son of the Father, so also is He the Son of His Mother, and thus by a special act of the power of His Father, which is the foundation of a peculiar relation of Mary to the Father, which is expressed by saying

that she is His daughter in a way of her own. The Holy Ghost brought about the Incarnation in her womb, and then she became in a special way beyond that in which it can be said of all saintly souls, the Spouse of the Holy Ghost. He had yet much to do in the consummation of that sanctity with which she was to be clothed at the time of her glorious entrance into Heaven, but all the history of the work of this grace in her must have been a continuation of the sanctification now imparted to her. In this sense the work of this moment lasted on for ever, and increased continually in the gifts of the three Divine Persons to this chosen Mother.

There are other privileges of our Blessed Lady in the list of which we are speaking, which may be considered as founded upon the grace of the Divine Maternity which she now received, although the time at which they began to manifest themselves in actual exercise was not yet. Thus, for instance, she is called the Virgin of virgins, in various senses, for her Virginity was altogether her own, and of a perfection not shared by others, and in this sense the privilege we speak of was hers at this time. But in another sense the name applies to her by virtue of that large and most beautiful company of virgins who have followed the holy counsel of continence as her children, of whose praise and of the fruits of whose work in the world, the Church is full. In this sense the privilege was something yet future. So again, when we speak of her as the Mother of the Redeemed, as the Gate of Heaven, as the Queen of Mercy, as having the Passion communicated to her, and as being exalted above all creatures, these

are privileges which flow from her Maternity, and are contained in it as in germ, but the time for their development had not come at the moment of the Incarnation. The privileges which are thus expressed are the fruits and issues of our Lord's greatness, and of the accomplishment of His work in the world. She has them from Him, and when she became His Mother she received her right to them, and began to be, in relation to those whom He has redeemed and exalted, what the names imply by which she is designated in respect of them.

CHAPTER II.

MARY AT THE VISITATION.

THE Providence of God showed itself wonderfully and beautifully in the manner in which the footsteps of our Blessed Lady were guided, after the accomplishment of the great mystery of the Incarnation. It seems almost impossible to imagine that she could have remained long in the same home with the blessed Joseph without either imparting to him the great secret of her Maternity, or feeling much embarrassment in keeping it from him. She had received no commission, as far as we are told, to do this, and God has His own designs as to the manner and the time in which He makes such revelations to us. In this case the knowledge of the Incarnation was to be made the occasion of a great process of grace in the heart of St. Joseph, and this was to be the appointed means by which he was to be fitted more and more for the work which he was to discharge in this Divine economy. Whenever St. Joseph became aware of what had passed, it was the will of God that Mary should, immediately on the Incarnation, be occupied in assisting and tending her cousin Elisabeth, and that her presence, and much more the presence of our Blessed Lord in her womb, was to be the source and occasion of very great

graces to the Blessed Baptist as well as to his holy parents. Thus her first months of maternity were to be spent in exercises of humility and charity.

St. Joseph most probably accompanied our Lady at the Visitation, which must have taken place about the time of his annual visit to Jerusalem for the feast of the Pasch. He must also probably have heard the words of St. Elisabeth on receiving the salutation of our Lady, and he may in other ways have become aware, even though not directly from her, of the great dignity to which she had been raised and of the presence of our Lord in her womb. But he had not received from her, or from any one else, a word of guidance as to his own position with reference to her as the Mother of God and to her Child when He should be born. As to this, Mary could tell him nothing. As God designed to make this matter the subject and the occasion of a great advance in the perfection of this blessed soul, it was well that he should be for a time separated from our Lady, as we suppose him to have been during the interval between the beginning of the Visitation and the return of Mary to her own home. Thus while God was using the presence of His Son and of His Mother with the holy family of Zachary for the purposes of His Providence with regard to the sanctification of St. John and his parents, He used her absence from St. Joseph for the purpose of carrying on to perfection His own work in the soul of the blessed spouse of Mary.

The history of the Visitation and the succeeding mysteries is so much wrapt up in the course of the Life of our Lord, that it seems needless to dwell on

them at any great length, though they are in truth mysteries of the life of Mary in particular. It will be enough to refer to the incidents, and to suppose that it is understood that our Lord was all the time most actively engaged in His Mother's womb, both in glorifying the Father by His most perfect adoration, and in sanctifying His Mother as well as the other saints whose names occur in the narrative. It will be enough to point out the features in the history which bear especially on our chief subject, that of the gradual advance and elevation of our Blessed Lady. The mention by the Angel of the state in which St. Elisabeth was must be considered as having suggested to our Lady the journey into the hill country of Judæa. It was not a distinct command, but it might easily have occurred to our Lady that the fact would not have been conveyed to her in that way, unless it had been meant that she should act on the knowledge. As our Lady had already been for some weeks the bride of St. Joseph, it would not have been natural that she should have taken such a journey without his leave, and probably without his company, and as has been already said, he would have to go about the same time at least as far as Jerusalem, that is, nine-tenths or more of the distance.

Up to the time of her arrival at the house of Zachary, we are not told of anything said to our Lady which implied a knowledge of the great event of the Incarnation. It may have been reserved as the reward and crown of her perfect credulity to the words of the Angel, that she should hear herself acknowledged as the Mother of God by the blessed

cousin for whose consolation and benefit she had made this long journey. The salutation of Elisabeth could not add anything to her faith, but it could add greatly to her joy, and give her fresh occasion for thankfulness. It might unlock her lips in the praises of God, Who had done for her things so great. The *Magnificat* is the revelation of the feelings and thoughts which had been within her ever since the moment of the Incarnation. It must be considered not simply as the hymn of thanksgiving of our Blessed Lady only, but as the outpouring, through her perfectly illuminated heart, of the gratitude of all creation, and of the race of mankind in particular, for the universal benefit which followed on the gift of His Son to us by God.

We are thus able to sum up in a comparatively few words the chief virtues practised by our Blessed Lady in this mystery. Her visit was, in the first place, an act of obedience. She understood from the words of the Angel that it would be well for her to go and rejoice by her presence, and assist in every way, her happy cousin Elisabeth. Such an intimation was to her a command, and as she was so much in love with obedience, this may have been the most direct and immediate motive present to her mind. But in other respects she could not but be eager to make the journey, for it was an act of charity to which she was invited. God had been very good to St. Elisabeth, and the knowledge of this filled Mary with a desire to rejoice with her and help her, and show her own intense gratitude to God for the far higher favour which she had herself received. Persons who have received such gifts and

graces are not anxious to disclose them to others, but they are anxious that others should share the mercies of God, Who has been so merciful to them. Our Lady could not but know that the Child in her womb was the blessing of the world, and that wherever He was, especially among the servants of His Father, He must be willing and desirous of spreading and scattering His graces. Then, again, the humble services which she hoped to render to St. Elisabeth had an attraction to her humility. She had just received the greatest boon that it was possible for one like her to receive, and she felt desirous to unburthen herself of her debt of gratitude to God by occupying herself in the ministrations to His servant which were now possible for her. She knew nothing of the revelation of her own secret to her cousin, and so could not expect to be met by Elisabeth with the honour and reverence which she was to receive. She hoped to spend her time, as long as it might be pleasing to God, in waiting on her cousin, in the humblest way, serving her as the representative of God, Who had done for her things so wonderful. And the knowledge that she had of the blessings which the presence of our Lord might bring upon that holy household made her Visitation a work of mercy as well as of charity, and she began even now to act as the Mother and Queen of Mercy, and as having a tender care for all the redeemed of our Lord, among whom she could not doubt that the child of Elisabeth would hold a high place, from the simple fact of his having been so marvellously conceived by an aged mother.

We know that it is the way of God to exalt the

humble, and thus it might have been expected by those who study His methods of action, that Mary would meet with some high honour on her arrival at the house of Zachary. We do not know what may have passed between her and St. Joseph, if he was already conscious of the elevation of his spouse. But it may be that the first human homage paid to the Mother of God, as such, was this which was now paid to her by the blessed Elisabeth. She cried out with a loud voice, "Blessed thou among women, and blessed the fruit of thy womb! and whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" The whole principle of the honour paid to Mary in Heaven and on earth, by the angels and saints and the children of the Church, is contained in these simple words. And as has been said, it is most probable that they fell on the ears of Mary with quite as much of suddenness and unexpectedness as the words of the Annunciation itself. But this time there was no hesitation, or silence, or prudent reserve, about the Blessed Mother. She does not decline the honour contained in the words of her cousin. On the contrary she accepts it, and extends it, for it must be with reference to the salutation of St. Elisabeth that she says almost immediately that all generations shall call her blessed, that is, that the words of her cousin shall be repeated in the Church throughout all generations.

Our Lady takes the honour to turn it at once to God, to whom it belongs, saying that her soul magnifies the Lord and her spirit rejoices in God her Saviour. And then she pours herself out in the

strain which sums up so perfectly the whole praise and gratitude which is due to God for His infinite condescension in taking on Him the nature of man. She praises Him for His great display of power, of holiness, of mercy, she sings of Him as conquering His enemies and the enemies of the human race in the Incarnation, as taking them in their own devices and scattering them in the imaginations of their own hearts. By the side of the humiliation of the proud, she sees His other wonderful work in the exaltation of the humble, and together with the sending away empty of the rich she sings of the filling the hungry with good things. Lastly she commemorates His faithfulness to His promises, and thus strikes the note of thanksgiving for the promises themselves from the beginning, as well as for their fulfilment, and for all the many graces which have come through faith in these promises.

The words of St. Elisabeth recognize the true position of the Blessed Mother of God, and we cannot doubt that during the three months of her stay Mary not only exercised herself in the humble services for which she had made the journey, but also far more in labouring in prayer and in all other ways open to her, for the greater and greater sanctification of the holy child and his parents. We cannot understand the Visitation aright unless we see in it the beginning in Mary of this office of Mother of all the Redeemed, which is one of the titles given to her by the saints. For in nothing that our Lady did from the moment of the Incarnation onwards, to which she had to give her joyful and deliberate assent, must she be considered as an

unconscious and involuntary instrument only of the sanctifications which were wrought through her. If this could have been the case we might have expected to be told that St. Elisabeth had passed over the Mother in order to hail the Child in her womb, and that the simple presence of our Lord, and not the words of Mary, had been the direct instrument in the sanctification of St. John. So it could and might have been, and no one doubts that the whole process of the blessing now imparted, whether to the mother or to the son, came from our Lord. But the actual circumstances of the case were as they were. The words of Mary wrought the marvel. And we may gather from this, as has been said, that our Lady was now for the first time exercising the office which belonged to her as the Mother of God, of God made Man, not simply to be one of us, but that He might redeem us and sanctify us and glorify us.

The last thing to be noted about this work of the Visitation, is that our Lady did not leave it until it was completed in the decrees of God. She did not leave the house, as it seems most probable, until after the naming of the child and the Cantic of St. Zachary, spoken after his restoration from the dumbness which had been inflicted on him as a penance for his want of perfect credulity to the words of the Angel. At that time the period of her temporary absence from the side of St. Joseph, as may be supposed, was accomplished. It is most reasonable to think that he came to fetch her home, and that this is the "taking to himself" of his wife, which is spoken of in the first chapter of

St. Matthew's Gospel. They returned together, full of joy and thankfulness, to Nazareth, there to remain until the moment came for both of them to leave their city for the journey which was to end at Bethlehem on the eve of the Nativity.

It is not our purpose here to go over the whole question of the hesitation of St. Joseph, which was happily terminated, as it would seem, about the time of the naming of St. John Baptist. This question has been discussed elsewhere,¹ and we assume here that the real trial of St. Joseph consisted in the fact that he had no Divine commission or instruction how to act under the altered circumstances of his position, after the Incarnation had taken place in the womb of his Blessed Spouse. He could neither leave Mary without pain, nor remain acting as her husband, and consequently as the head of the Holy Family, without some guidance as to the will of God. He had come to the half-formed conclusion that as he had no order from Heaven to assume the office of the father of the Divine Child, it would be better for him to act the humble part of one who felt himself unworthy of so high a position, which implied not only the care and protection of the Mother and her Child, but also the responsibility of their guidance and government, and thus he came to think of withdrawing himself from her company, or rather, of not fetching her home again after her visit to the blessed household of Zachary. To do this would be an act of some authority, and would imply the assumption of similar authority for the future.

¹ See *The Nine Months*, c. xiii.

We know how this question was settled, when the appointed time came, by the vision of the Angel in which St. Joseph was directed to take on himself the office of which he thought himself unworthy. We cannot doubt that not even St. John or St. Elisabeth were more constantly in the thoughts or the prayers of Mary, during this interval of their separation, than he. St. Joseph may perhaps have spent it in his former home at Bethlehem, as he must have known from our Lady the time at which the birth of the child of Elisabeth might be looked for. Considering her wonderful exaltation, and the power and intensity of her prayers, we may well think that her intercession kept up and raised to still higher sanctity the spouse whom she loved with such entire and devoted a love. We may well think that as the devotion of her spouse to the beautiful virtue of continence had been in this way her work, so also he was guided and helped all through the weeks of his trial by the fervent prayers of Mary. It cannot be doubted that her desires to see him associated with herself in the work of carrying out the mystery of the Incarnation were most intense, such as could only be satisfied if the decision of Heaven had been for their separation, by the consideration of the decree of God to which everything else must bow. It must have been the greatest possible joy to Mary when the time came to learn that he was to remain always by her side, and to share with her the wonderful task of the bringing up of our Lord. The exigencies of the narrative of St. Matthew have made him speak only of the hesitation of St. Joseph. But it must be certain that the trial of his faithful-

ness and humility was also a trial of the heart of Mary, to whom it would indeed have been a pain to have to walk on her path of life without his companionship and guidance. And great indeed must have been the joy of both when all doubts were at an end, and they came together again after their separation with so much new matter in their hearts for gratitude to God and for increased devotion one to another.

When they returned to their new home at Nazareth there were still between five and six months to pass before the date of the Nativity. It is a time of which we have no record at all to guide our thoughts, but we are sure that it was spent by that blessed pair in the most fervent prayers to God, in continual homage and adoration to the unseen Child, Whose presence made the womb of His Mother like Heaven itself, and in preparation, as far as preparation was possible, for the moment so intensely desired when the Christ should be born. Their mutual intercourse and conversation must have been most tender and devout, while to our Blessed Lady it was not merely a time during which she could continually lean on St. Joseph for help and support, but also when she could practise her beloved virtue of humility in letting herself be ruled and governed by him with perfect submission and a heavenly purity of intention. We commonly think of our Blessed Lady as showing wonderful humility in submitting herself to the provisions of the Mosaic Law when she became a mother, in such matters as her Purification. But it must be remembered that her practice of humility and submission began long

before that, especially from the date of her marriage with St. Joseph. For a moment it had seemed as if she were to be entirely freed from any such dependence and subjection by the elevation which had raised her above all creatures as the Mother of God. But it was not so to be. On the contrary, as the Mother of God she was to have the privilege of practising obedience and subjection in a loftier degree than before, which made every act of these virtues more precious in the sight of Heaven than they might have been before her exaltation, while the same fact gave a new character to the exercise on the part of St. Joseph of the authority which his position as her husband conferred upon him. These six months made a period in their lives which was never to return in some of its features. It was a time of the utmost calm and peace, of hushed expectation, and earnest hope and prayer. Their secret was known to none about them, as we may suppose, and it imposed on them the duty of worshipping and honouring the God Who was so close to them with a homage that might be rendered to Him in the name of the whole world. Yet in the eyes of all around them they were like any other pair, living entirely in and for one another, and expecting with all the ordinary joy and hope the time which would knit them together by a new and most tender tie, by the birth into the world of the Child Whom they were expecting.

CHAPTER III.

MARY AT THE NATIVITY.

WHEN we reach the mystery of the Nativity of our Blessed Lord, it is but natural that He should Himself become so engrossing a figure in the picture which we try to draw for ourselves, that with our weak powers of attention we have little of it to bestow on any one else. Nevertheless it belongs to Christian contemplation to endeavour to take in the whole of God's dealings in these great mysteries, and on this account when we are specially drawing out for ourselves those dealings with our Blessed Lady or with St. Joseph, it is necessary to fix our eyes on them more exclusively. In truth, they can never be separated from Him. Mary especially is a part of Him, and it is more true to say that we contemplate Him altogether incompletely when we omit her, than to say that any attention paid to her history takes away our minds from Him. Without her, we should miss the most beautiful part of His work, the part most dear to Himself. We shall find, then, that there are certain features in what has come down to us of those dealings which are greatly worthy of notice, and which furnish us with great occasions for glorifying God. Here again we must make use of theological reasonings rather than

of any direct statements of the Sacred Text, which is as short here as elsewhere, and which in the narrative of the Nativity and of many of the earlier incidents of the Infancy may be considered as being comparatively silent about our Lady in particular, for the very reason that she was herself the chief informant of the Evangelists in this part of their work.

Nothing is said on the subject in the New Testament, but it seems a matter of Christian reason to be sure that while our Lord was in the womb of His Blessed Mother she was free from all the inconveniences and sufferings which are now the lot of all mothers during that time, and which it is reasonable to consider as a part of the consequences of original sin. It is hard to conceive it possible that our Lord could have been a burthen and an occasion of misery to His Mother at such a time. It is an extension of the same truth to see that the actual childbearing of our Blessed Lady was free from all pain and trouble of every kind. She required no assistance or nursing, her Son was born in a marvellous and preternatural manner, she was able to wrap Him herself in the clothes she had provided for Him, and to discharge, with immense joy and delight, all the offices which are usually the mother's part in such cases. At the actual Birth of our Lord no one was present but herself and the holy angels, but as soon as all was over, and when the Child was in His Mother's arms and at her holy breast, the blessed Joseph was able to pour forth his thankful adoration to Him of Whom as father he was to undertake the charge.

The Church believes that a further privilege was conferred on our Blessed Lady at the moment of her childbearing, of which it would have been out of place for the Gospels to make specific mention, especially as we have in them probably no account of the Nativity which does not come from Mary herself. But there is solid foundation in Scripture for the truth of which we speak, inasmuch as it is said in the prophecy of Isaias, that the Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and the words seem to imply that she is to be a Virgin both in her conception and in her bearing. This truth is confirmed by the universal tradition of the Church, and is very dear indeed to the Catholic mind. Our Lord worked a marvellous miracle for this purpose, preserving in some hidden way the perfect integrity of His Mother both in His Conception and in the act of His coming forth from her sacred womb. This privilege was due to the honour of this Blessed Mother, to the perfect purity of her soul, to her consecration of herself by vow to God, to her faithful abandonment of the guard of her promised Virginity to the custody of God in her Annunciation, to the special glory of her Virgin Maternity, to the majesty of our Lord her Son, and to the great dignity she was to hold in His Kingdom, and also to the commission intrusted to her to raise in the world the standard of perfect integrity and continence for the example of others and for the immense benefit of the whole human race. The manner in which this integrity was preserved is hidden from us, nor need we inquire curiously into such a matter, especially as we have other miracles of our Lord which may be considered

as figures of this, as when He left the Holy Sepulchre without breaking the stone or the seals set by the Jews, or entered the room in which the disciples were assembled through the closed door. Our Blessed Lady must have been conscious of the working of the miracle, and it must have filled her heart with joy and thankfulness.

The devout woman who is mentioned in the Gospels as having lifted up her voice out of the crowd to praise the Mother of our Lord, is reported to have declared her to be blessed on two accounts, because her womb had born the Son of the Eternal Father, and because her breasts had suckled the Lord Christ, as the Church sings. When our Lord had been wrapped in His swathing bands, our Lady gave Him to suck from her pure bosom, and this must have been an occasion of new joy and gratitude to her. It implied that, all through the time of His Infancy and Childhood she was to minister to Him in the way of ordinary mothers to their children, only without the weariness and fatigue and exhaustion and other sufferings which may be incidental in such relations. These are the delights and choicest pleasures of all good Christian mothers, who would think it one of the greatest degradations possible to allow others to perform these duties for them, except in cases of absolute necessity, as if they were not fit by their worldliness and frivolity to be the mothers of Christian children. The whole of these services as Mother were discharged by our Lady with the utmost joy and faithfulness, and must have been to her occasions of immense grace in reward for that faithfulness, and the love and purity of in-

tention with which they were performed by her. Thus day after day she mounted higher and higher in the Kingdom of grace, not only by the special graces which she may have received from time to time from the immense bounty of God, and by the continual communications which passed between her soul and the Heart of her Blessed Son, but also by the exercise of the simplest duties of a mother, which can be blest by God for the sanctification of all who in such cases discharge them with devotion and a pure intention, as St. Paul implies.¹

Another point which belongs to this contemplation is that our Lady now began to converse with those who came to visit and honour the new-born King of the world, such as the shepherds, and those who may have come after them on hearing what they had to say. It is indeed very possible that the first visitants of the Crib in the cave, the holy angels sent from Heaven by the Father to adore His Son in His Human Nature, may have made themselves manifest to our Blessed Lady before their departure to announce the glad tidings to the shepherds. In this case our Lady's converse as the Mother of the holy Child would have begun with them. When the time came for the shepherds to approach, it would be her place to receive them and show her Son to them, not with the foolish pride which may be found in some mothers who are ready to boast of the beauty or other external qualities of their babes, but with the serious and grave joy of the Mother of the Redeemer. No doubt she understood and took in all the circumstances of the Nativity, which had been so carefully chosen and arranged by our Lord.

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 15.

and which revealed to her what those conditions were which He especially loved—poverty, obscurity, humiliation, pain, discomfort, homelessness, and the like. In all these things she could read the lesson which He was beginning so early to teach to the world, a lesson which had its peculiar character from the office of our Lord as Saviour and Redeemer, as well as of Teacher as to the dangers of all those things which the world usually clings to and desires. This was the beginning of His teaching, and therefore of the drinking in of that teaching on the part of His Blessed Mother, who formed with St. Joseph the whole company of His disciples at this time.

It is now that we find for the first time the words concerning our Blessed Lady which are once more repeated at a later period of the Infancy. "Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart." In a narrative which is so short, and in which every word seems to have been measured and weighed before it was inserted, it cannot be thought that a statement of this kind would be twice repeated, unless it were meant that we should gather from it some important truth, at least with regard to the characteristic grace and office of this Blessed Mother. It was now for the first time that our Lord manifested Himself to the outer world. Before this He had been the treasure of His Mother and St. Joseph alone, hidden from all beside, except in so far as He had shown His power in the case of the blessed child who was to be His Precursor. The manifestations of Himself by our Blessed Lord, therefore, as far as they had been made at all, had been internal and spiritual, but now, as soon as He

was born into the world, He entered on a new phase of existence in this respect, because His presence was now visible and tangible, and, however silent and apparently helpless, capable of receiving homage and honour, and of dealing with men externally and visibly. As has been said, the circumstances of the Providential arrangement of His Life in the world, the persons called around Him, the manner of their conduct towards Him, the course of events which affected Him, and the like, were now all subject of devout contemplation, as they were, in their way and degree, manifestations of His will and choice, and of the place and position which He chose to occupy in the eyes of men. The most marvellous of histories, therefore, was now beginning, and it was fitting that it should have, if not its historian, at least some intelligent heart and mind that could watch it and appreciate it, and learn from its study what God wished to be gathered from it.

This was the office of our Blessed Lady, and it seems to be this that is meant when we are reminded that she made it her practice to keep all these things in her heart. And it seems reasonable to think, as will be drawn out more fully hereafter, that this habit which she contracted during the first days of the Holy Infancy, was continued during the remainder of her life, and that she was always contemplating, with devout and eager attention, the events connected with our Lord as they passed before her, much as we may suppose the holy Angels in Heaven now contemplate, and have always contemplated, the marvellous order of the government of God over the world. There are always in the

Church a certain number of souls who are thus occupied, and while they give continual glory and thanks to God for His wonders, in a manner which to some extent gives back to Him His due in this respect, they are also in many ways the supports and mainstays of the Militant Church, either guiding it by their wise counsels, or, far more, bringing down on its rulers blessings and light by their prayers.

Thus we find that the Nativity of our Lord was a point of time at which it is reasonable to suppose that our Blessed Lady received some great advance in the graces bestowed upon her, for the reason, in the first place, that it was a great point in advance in the unfolding of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, and in the second place, that it was a point at which she entered in some respects into new relations with Him, involving new duties, and requiring new supplies of Divine power. It was the occasion to her of the reception, from the love and magnificent gratitude of her Son, of the grace which is commemorated by the Church when she sings *post partum Virgo inviolata permansisti*, and begs her intercession on this ground also. It was the occasion of the beginning of a number of new and most loving services on her part to Him, recompensed by a continual stream of the most tender manifestations of affection and gratitude on His part to her. It was the occasion of the beginning of her dealings with others as the nursing Mother of the great King, Whom they came to honour. And it was also the beginning of that watchful and thoughtful study of the course of Providence in His regard, which was in an especial way the office and the

characteristic of this Blessed Mother, an office to her discharge of which we owe many things indeed in the history as far as we are able to understand it, but probably far more of which we do not suspect our obligation to her.

We have thus in our Blessed Lady, in this mystery of the Nativity, a twofold grace which has lasted on, after having been first made to rest on her head, for the benefit of the children of the Church. For in the silence of the cave, when our Lord came forth from her sacred womb, she received, as has been said, the miraculous gift by which her spotless virginity was preserved for ever, after the birth of her Son as well as before, and this gift, thus shrined in Mary, has made her the Mother of thousands of virgins, who have followed her in her devotion to this most beautiful virtue, whether as consecrated to the service of the altar and the ministration of the sacraments, and of the word of God, or in the simple dedication of religious life, or of personal continence in the world. The Church has thus received blessings which cannot be counted, of all of which Mary is the Queen. And in the second place, it was now that began in the Church, in the person of the same glorious Mother, the holy habit of contemplation of the doings of God through His Incarnate Son. Thus was laid the foundation of the fabric of Christian thought and theology, the treasures of ascetic lore and spiritual wisdom were first accumulated in the heart of the Blessed Mother.

Our Blessed Lady, then, was the first to see, in the manifestations of Himself by our Lord in the

crib, the exercise of His office of Redeemer and of Teacher. She was the first to understand how it was that His infinite compassion and mercifulness made Him choose to take on Himself all the sufferings and miseries of our human condition, sin only excepted, not in order that He might know them, for He knew them before by His Divine knowledge, and by the imparted knowledge stored up in His Sacred Humanity, but that He might know them in that way which could most perfectly make Him sympathize with us under them, that is, in the way of personal experience. Thus she could see in this condescension of His, now first manifested to the world, the intensity and the tenderness of His mercy. She, too, was the first to understand that He took on Himself the same penalties of our mortal condition, for the other purpose of expiating for the offences against God which indulgence in the good things of this world, which He now rejected, had so often caused, and for the brood of evils which they had generated for the souls of men. And she, too, was the first student in the school which He now opened, as our Teacher by example, of the manner in which these things were to be used by us in order to please God, and walk securely and meritoriously on the path to Heaven. She was the first to understand His preference for the poor and simple and lowly, when He called the shepherds, first of all mankind, to do Him homage in His cradle, and made them almost the companions of the angels, in the blessings which He lavished on them in return for their humble worship, and their lowly offerings.

CHAPTER IV.

FORTY DAYS.

BETWEEN the Nativity of our Lord and the Purification of His Blessed Mother, when also He was presented in the Temple, an interval of forty days took place, in obedience to the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law. This must have been a time of deep quiet and silence on the part of the Holy Family, broken only, as to any striking events, by the ceremony of the Circumcision, when our Lord submitted to the painful rite which derived all its efficacy from Him, when His Precious Blood was shed for the first time, and when His Mother and St. Joseph gave Him the holy name of Jesus. We may speak first of the time itself of the forty days, and then pass on to the consideration of our Blessed Lady's part in the mystery of the Circumcision and Naming of Jesus.

It must be uncertain whether this happy time of the forty days was spent in the cave which had witnessed the Birth of our Lord, or whether our Lady and St. Joseph found some small dwelling where they might be more withdrawn from the public gaze, or at least from the possibility of interruption. Perhaps this cave had a tenement in front, like the Holy House at Nazareth. Mary and Joseph

would not refuse to let our Lord be seen and venerated by any devout worshippers who might come to them in consequence of the reports spread abroad by the Shepherds. But except for that service of charity, they would naturally keep themselves in great retirement. The forty days were days of seclusion for her. She observed the prescriptions of the Law, although her childbearing had been so different from all others, especially in its freedom from all those circumstances which would naturally make her state one of legal impurity. On this account she could not have entered the Temple, or the Tabernacle, and perhaps the same reason would disqualify her from attendance in the synagogue at Bethlehem. But the greatest reason, perhaps, for her indulging at this time her love of seclusion and privacy, would be her desire to be alone with God and to spend the days, not too long for her, in quiet contemplation and prayer by the side of her newborn Son. We know how great a charm the devotion to the Infant Jesus has for contemplative souls, and we naturally place our Blessed Lady at the head of the large multitude who have spent days and nights in contemplating our Lord in the crib.

It would require a volume, or many volumes, merely to enumerate the heads of contemplation over which the mind and heart of our Lady may have been occupied during these six weeks of quiet. We consider her to have been stored with all her wonderful knowledge and intelligence, which had been increased so rapidly as she grew in years and cooperated most faithfully to her grace, for this

chief purpose among others, that she might keep in her heart and mind a faithful record of the great bounties of God as they came before her eyes one after another, reflecting as in a most faithful mirror the wonders of His Providence, and returning each to Him with intense gratitude and love. That this was the occupation of Mary is suggested by the words of the Gospel concerning her which have often been quoted. We suppose her to have been accustomed to the contemplation of the surpassing condescension of God in becoming her Son from the moment, at least, of the accomplishment of the mystery in her womb. But the Nativity had not only brought about a further most important step in the unfolding of God's plans, it had also shown the depths of His counsels in the manner of their execution. The circumstances of suffering, poverty, humiliation, were all new lines in the picture. The more God humbled Himself for us, the more need was there for gratitude and homage on the part of His creatures. The Angels had come to honour Him in His humiliations, the Shepherds had come and had gone as the representatives of the chosen people. But Mary remained ever by His side, not merely to discharge her loving duties as His Mother, but also to be His worshipper, His adorer, the soul that was to give Him, on the part of all mankind, the tenderest, most reverent, and most unceasing thanks and praise for His great condescension, and to reap in her own soul ineffable blessings, as His grace was shed forth on her in return for her faithfulness.

Thus the weeks of this holy time passed on, each day showing, perhaps, something more of the com-

passionate condescension of our Lord in the humiliations and sufferings of His Sacred Humanity, and furnishing to His Mother fresh subjects for study, fresh instruction, fresh matter for praise. It was now that it became manifest that He was to submit Himself to the requirements of the Law, though He could not by any right be the subject of the Law, and yet this very subjection of His was necessary, in order that it might have the salutary power which it possessed for those who faithfully obeyed it. Thus the decision about the Circumcision of our Lord, which took effect by the action of St. Joseph as the head of the family, brought out to the thoughtful mind of our Lady a beautiful revelation of the counsel of God which was to rule the whole dispensation of the Incarnation. It would, no doubt, cost her much, as it would cost much to our Lord Himself, but it was the will of God and the design of His Infinite Wisdom and condescension.

Mary would thus see in the Circumcision of our Lord, in the first place, His humiliation and self-abasement before the decree of His Father. For to be subject to the rite of circumcision was to take upon Himself the condition of one born in original sin. It was for the removal of some of the effects of original sin, especially the alienation from God and the incapacity to enter Heaven, that this holy rite had been given to Abraham. It is true that before it was so given, and from the beginning of the world, there had been ways of reconciliation with God through faith in the promised Redeemer, which was expressed in some simple form of sacrifice and prayer. But it was a great advance in God's

merciful provisions for man when circumcision was endowed with the power of bringing the children of Abraham into covenant with God, because the rite was enjoined on all, a certain time for it was fixed, it was administered to infants, and so to all males, while its effects were not confined to one sex, the female children sharing in the benefit, though they could not be submitted to the rite, for which, as is probable, some other ceremony or some prayer was substituted. Again, Mary might see in the Circumcision of our Lord the meritorious furnishing on His part, as the Redeemer of all, of the grace which had been granted to all who had received it, and of all other graces which had been founded on it and granted to the children of the Covenant. This would fill her heart with thankfulness. Again, she might see in it the beginning of that shedding of the Precious Blood which was to be poured out on the Cross for the redemption of the world. Further, she might dwell on the symbolical meaning of the rite, as the initiation of those who were to be the heirs of the covenant in the holy and saving practice of mortification, mortification not of the flesh only, but much more of the soul and spirit, which was necessary for a thousand ends of interior purity and holiness. Moses had laid down the doctrine that they were to circumcise the foreskin of their hearts,¹ if they wished to be the true people of God, and the same doctrine is found in the prophets. And, again, she might look forward to the time when this external rite was to be taken away, as no longer needed in the Kingdom of the

¹ Deut. x. 16.

Gospel, and as having been accomplished and laid aside by virtue of our Lord's obedience thereto.

Our Lady would not miss, moreover, the significance of the Holy Name which she then gave her Child, nor the further significance of the fact that it was given to Him at the time of this first shedding of His Blood. The doctrine of the salvation of the world to be wrought by Him was contained in the Holy Name, which had been made the subject of special injunction to herself before the Incarnation, and to St. Joseph afterwards. "His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the Angel before He was conceived in the womb." The words seem to imply that she herself gave the name, as St. Elisabeth gave the name to St. John, which was then confirmed by St. Zachary. It is not likely that our Blessed Lady could have failed to understand the prophecies concerning the Passion as the redemption of the world. Much less could she have been ignorant of the real significance of the many sheddings of blood in the expiatory and other sacrifices of the Law. "Without shedding of blood there was no remission," and yet, as the same Apostle says, it is impossible that with the blood of oxen and goats sin should be taken away.² Thus the ceremonial of the Temple contained an ever recurring witness to the necessity of a true atonement, of which all those sacrifices were figures. This principle at least our Lady must have known, though we are not told how far it had as yet been revealed to her that her Child was to suffer at the Passion in the manner which afterwards came

² Heb. ix. 22; x. 4.

about. She had not yet heard the words of holy Simeon, which contained the formal declaration to her on this point, as far as it was then to be declared. But amid all her intense joy at the giving and using of the Holy Name, there must have been the recognition of this element of suffering for the sake of expiation, without which the connection of the Name with the Circumcision could not have been fully understood.

Thus this particular mystery must have furnished her with fresh matter for meditation and consideration, and she must have been the first in the Church to turn her mind and heart to their contemplations. It is on the devout and affectionate consideration of these great truths of the Incarnation and Life of our Lord that the souls of Christians of all classes and conditions have been fed day after day in the Church. It is this that has been the great means of their enlightenment, their strength, their progress in the ways of God, their mortification. It is for this that we are told what we are told of the history of our Lord's Life. Thus immense stores of grace are wrapped up in the blessing by which we are allowed to know the facts which are the external part of these mysteries. According to the rule of which we have already spoken, the use of these means of grace, so profitable to all who use them faithfully, is more and more profitable in proportion to the enlightenment and fervour and purity and love which the souls who consider them have already gained. Thus these mysteries were more to Mary than they can be to any other, though to all their consideration is most healthful, and may be, in a

certain sense, even necessary to salvation. We may well, therefore, imagine how large were the outpourings of grace and light which were shed on this most faithful and intelligent soul of the Mother of God, and how great must have been her advance as she dwelt on them in thankful contemplation.

This does not exhaust the sources of her increase of grace at this time. For in all these mysteries of our Lord, especially in the Sacred Infancy, Mary was not simply a spectator and a contemplative of the wonders which God was working. She had a part in them all, they were mysteries of her life, as well as of His. She was an agent in them, her affections and heart were sacrificed and had to suffer in submission to the decrees of God, as her most perfect will was bent in the most loving and humble submission thereto. On this account it is natural to think that all such times, as has been said, were occasions on which the immense bountifulness of God shed forth on His chosen handmaiden larger gifts and more magnificent graces.

CHAPTER V.

MARY AT THE PURIFICATION.

THE forty days appointed by the Law were soon past, for when time is spent in quiet retirement with God, and in uniform duties and occupations, it seems to fly on wings of unwonted swiftness. After the Circumcision, there was no incident to break the quiet continuity of the time. Our Lady was occupied in her ministration to our Lord of all the most tender motherly services, and lost in perpetual contemplation of His greatness, and His condescension, and His humiliation. He was obedient to her, letting her arrange for Him and judge for Him, as if He had been indeed a helpless, unconscious Babe, and this added an immense awe and reverence to her services to Him. St. Joseph, perhaps, had to occupy himself to provide some little sustenance for the family, and few but he entered the little room or shed in which our Lord and His Mother were housed. The mystery of the Circumcision had settled once for all any question that might possibly arise as to the observance of all legal prescriptions by our Lady as well as by her Son. She had no need at all of purification, nor need she have presented her First-born in the Temple, as He was already entirely dedicated to His Father, or redeem

by a poor offering Him Who was the Redeemer of the whole world. But Mary understood that it must be her great delight to be as our Lord in all these matters. Thus, when the six weeks were drawing to their close, she made with the help of St. Joseph her preparation for the short journey to Jerusalem.

The scene at the Purification of our Blessed Lady has been dwelt on elsewhere at great length, and it is only necessary here to speak of it in especial relation to the particular object of this work. In the first place we are struck that Mary now comes before us for the first time as the principal person in at least a part of the ceremony. For she it was who had to make the offering after her childbirth, as if she had been like any other Jewish mother, to have prayers said for her and a blessing given her by the priest, after which she might again enter the sacred precincts as far as they were open to women. It must have been an immense joy to her to go through this sacred rite, for it gave her an opportunity of sharing in the humiliation of our Lord Himself, Who had undergone the rite of circumcision when there was in Him nothing that could oblige Him to it. So was His Blessed Mother entirely free from all need of purification, and indeed, if the words of the Law were interpreted in their strictest sense, they did not touch her case at all. It was all the greater joy to her to bear her part in the rite, and to receive back again the privilege of admission to the Temple and congregation which she had never really lost. And in so far also as the redemption of her Child

by the payment and the offering which were insisted on, belonged to her, it was a joy to her on this account also to discharge the obligation which was not really incumbent on her.

By her humility and faithfulness in this mystery of the Purification, our Lady would rise higher in grace, and would merit some special favours from God on this occasion also. It was no light thing to present to the Eternal Father the Son of His Love, Incarnate for our sakes, in the Human Nature which He had taken of her. It was done with the most intense devotion, and she offered herself again and again to His service in the deepest gratitude for the gift which had been bestowed upon her. Such an oblation as hers would naturally draw down on her some special grace, in connection with the mystery of our Lord which was now carried out. But it is easy to see that the mystery of the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple on this occasion could not have been without some reference to the sacrifice of Himself to the glory of His Father, which was the great desire of His Heart. The words which St. Paul quotes of him, "Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not, but a body Thou hast fitted to Me, holocausts for sin did not please Thee. Then said I, Behold I come, in the head of the book it is written of Me, that I should do Thy will, O God,"¹ are said by the Apostle to apply specially to our Lord's entrance in the world. But they may well be applied to this His first entrance into the Temple, and any words that refer to the sacrifice of His Body must include a reference to the oblation of Himself which was to

¹ Hebrews x. 5—7.

be made on the Cross. Thus we see that the mystery of the Passion of our Lord underlies, in this sense, the mystery of the Presentation in the Temple.

If this indeed be so, then it is not wonderful that, chief among the incidents of this occasion, we should find the first open declaration to our Blessed Lady about the future Passion. If she had been like any other mother, she might have been preparing to leave those holy courts, so dear and so familiar to her, after the sacred rite had been performed, with her heart full of holy happiness, because she had presented her First-born to God and had received Him back again, trusting that the whole of her future life might be spent in harmony with the oblation of that day. But she knew already more about her Divine Child than ordinary mothers could think of as possible for their own children. She must have had many intimations of His future, besides all that her faithful and most intelligent mind could gather from the prophecies and types of the Old Testament, from the sacrificial system of the Law, and the like. Comparing together all the various streams of light which had been imparted to her, she might well know, especially after the Circumcision, that her Son might have to suffer as a sacrifice, because He was called Jesus and was to be the Saviour of the world. But it is one thing to surmise and think likely, or even to have a clear conviction that something sorrowful and painful is to be, and quite another to have what we have thought probable, or even certain, announced to us by some one who has a right to speak on the part of God.

This then was the special crown which was placed on the head of our Blessed Lady, a crown of thorns and grief indeed, when the holy Simeon spoke to her those famous words in which his prophecy was conveyed. He prophesied first of the mission of our Lord as one that was to issue in the fall of many as well as in the resurrection of many. Then he added that our Lord was Himself to be a sign of contradiction, a mark for the obloquy and reviling of men, from whom such treatment could not be expected, inasmuch as He came to save men from their sins and from the consequences of their sins, and had indeed just offered Himself most solemnly to His Father for His execution of this purpose. And then the holy old man added that her own soul also a sword was to pierce—all that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed. Thus then was the future Passion predicted, though not in any fulness of detail. It was rather the opposition and contradiction of men that was predicted, the hardness and perverseness and malignity of the human heart which are the sources of all the opposition with which the loving condescension and advances of God are met, all the more savagely the more loving they are. It was not yet said that our Lord should be done to death by men, for that fulness of revelation was kept back for a later time. But it was added that her own soul should be pierced by a sword, which could be no other than a sword of grief and compassion. She then was to witness the accomplishment of the Divine purpose for which her Son was sent into the world, and she was to have her share in the suffering which it involved.

There the prophecy stopped for the time. It was enough that she should know that what she may have surmised was true, that, as St. Paul said to Agrippa, "the Christ should suffer," and that she was to suffer with Him. It was not the time to draw it all out in detail, what the sufferings of our Lord were to be, how far she should share in them, what would be their glorious effect in those who were to profit by them, and not be ruined by the appearance of the Saviour, what was to be her own share in their fruits, how it was that though no one but Himself could give them their atoning power, she was still to have a share of her own in the application of their merits by her powerful intercession. The foundation of all these points of doctrine was laid, and that was enough for the time.

The incident of the prophecy of Simeon may thus be considered as marking another great advance in the dignity and privileges of our Lady. For now for the first time is the Passion distinctly spoken of in the history, and at this point of its first mention Mary is as distinctly associated therewith. The Passion is not mentioned apart from the Compassion. Thus we may date from this moment the beginning of that "communication of the Passion" to her of which the holy writers speak. It raises her, not only to the throne of the Queen of Sorrows, but to the privilege of having a singular power in bringing home to others the fruits of that supreme sacrifice.

It appears from the words of St. Luke, that immediately after the Purification, the Holy Family returned, not to Bethlehem, but to Nazareth. Nazareth was the home at least of our Lady's

family, and perhaps also of some of the near relatives of St. Joseph. If the Annunciation followed, as seems natural, on the Espousals of our Lady after the interval of two months or so, they would have time both before the Visitation and after it to make themselves well known to their neighbours in the little city, many of whom must have been their relatives. Thus their return to Nazareth had in it this much of trial, that the friends and relatives who knew them best, and were likely to cultivate great familiarity with them, would feel the greatest interest in the Child Who had been born to them during their absence, and would treat Him like any other babe of the same age, not knowing with Whom they were dealing. Nor could our Lady or St. Joseph make the Divine secret known, nor, if they had endeavoured to do this, would they have been believed.

Thus the return to her home was a new trial on the extreme patience and sweetness of the Blessed Mother. She must give our Lord to be caressed and handled by her relatives, who would have no more thought of behaving to Him with reverence than a person who might by accident take up a consecrated Host thinking It to be unconsecrated. Moreover, there is always great attractiveness about a new-born child, people crowd in to see it and congratulate the mother, and it might be thought churlish in her to refuse to gratify their innocent and friendly curiosity. And yet the slightest want of external reverence would go to the hearts of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, and they would find it a continual struggle to keep silence and to

bear in patience many things which were simply the results of ignorance. It was a trial which afterwards must have returned during the Hidden Life, but it would be felt more keenly at this time when our Lord was an Infant in His Mother's arms. Even till near the time of the Passion, there were some among the near relatives of our Lord who did not acknowledge Who He was. At the present time the trial did not last long, for it seems that the Holy Family soon left Nazareth in order to settle at Bethlehem, or at least to revisit it. The occasion may have been nothing more than the recurrence of the great feast of the Pasch, at which time it was to be their custom to go up to Jerusalem. Once there, they may have passed on to Bethlehem, and there they may have been found by the Wise Kings from the East. Then the Flight into Egypt became a necessity, and for some considerable space of time the Holy Family was absent from their home. It must always be a question whether they had not migrated to Bethlehem, meaning to reside there, before the visit of the Kings. But this is a matter the discussion of which need hardly be repeated here.

CHAPTER VI.

MARY AT THE EPIPHANY.

WHATEVER may have been the reason for the return of the Holy Family to Bethlehem at the time of the visit of the Wise Kings, we are at least certain that it was there that our Lord was found by these holy pilgrims. We must pass by, in the present work, the history of the Kings before their arrival at Bethlehem, a history which is full of beauty and of instruction. They had been led to Jerusalem by the prophecy of Balaam about the Star, and by the Star itself which had appeared to them in their own distant country. Jerusalem, that is, the Chief Priests and Scribes, representing the ecclesiastical authority in the holy nation, had given them a plain answer, founded on the prophecy of Micheas, concerning the place at which the promised Messiah was to be born. The fact of His Birth was assumed by the Kings. It was the signification of that fact by the appearance of the Star which had made them leave their own countries for this long and laborious journey, probably of four or five months. Jerusalem, however, knew nothing of it. The Jews had a number of other prophecies, of which these Princes were ignorant, and they might have known that the weeks of Daniel's prediction must be drawing to their close, and that

the sceptre of which Jacob had spoken on his death-bed had departed from Juda. But these simple strangers found no sympathy in Jerusalem. If there were many there, like Simeon and Anna, who had some knowledge of the truth, it is not certain that the Kings communicated with them. But at least Jerusalem sent them on their way to Bethlehem, although they were under a kind of pledge to the wicked Edomite on the throne to return to him and inform him of the result of their quest. Then, as they went on their road, their Star blazed out in the evening sky, and guided their feet to the spot where the young Child was.

That our Lord's loving Heart was watching over these favoured souls must be taken for granted. He had arranged the appearance of the Star, He had inspired them with the devout and courageous thought of undertaking the journey, He had guided and guarded them in their fearless questioning of the Jewish authorities, and He had put into the mouths of the Priests, as of old into the mouths of the Prophets, the answer that was to satisfy them. Every footstep of their journey was counted in His Heart. The question which we are inclined to ask ourselves is whether our Blessed Lady had any expectation of their coming? Some of the contemplatives of the Church tell us that she had, that she knew this and other features in the history by special inspiration, before they came about. We might find instances in Sacred Scripture of this kind of partial and communicated foreknowledge, and it is also to be found in the lives of the Saints. We can only answer the question by saying that,

even without questioning the possibility of any such preternatural communications in her case, our Blessed Lady, in her perfect intelligence of the ways of God, must have had some surmises as to a coming of kings from afar to worship our Lord, though there was not in Scripture any prophecy that could fix this coming to a particular time or place. It is reasonable to think that she was raised far above the narrow views as to God's Providence which we find later on in some of her nation, but which were in truth, inconsistent with Scripture as well as with the character of God. She quite understood that, as St. Paul says, God was not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also. She understood that the Child she had borne was the Saviour of the whole world. She would easily remember the prophecies of Isaias as pointing to something like the very scene which her eyes saw before her, when the Kings arrived with their train of servants to do their homage to our Lord.

Moreover, there had been more than one reference to the return of the Gentiles to the Church in what had lately been in her mind and had sounded in her ears. In her own Canticle she had been guided to speak principally of the Incarnation as exalting the lowly race of mankind to the thrones which had been forfeited by the rebel Angels, and she had referred also to the faithfulness of God in becoming Incarnate in the race of Abraham and the other Fathers of the holy line. But the promises made to Abraham included the blessing, in his seed, of all the nations of the world. St. Zachary had

spoken distinctly of the promises made since the beginning of the world, and of the enlightenment of those who were sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. After that had come the Canticle and the prophecy of holy Simeon, who had spoken most precisely of the illumination of the Gentiles as the issue of the salvation brought into the world by the coming of our Lord, and he had even put it before the glory of the people of Israel. Thus there had been abundant preparation, in what had lately passed, for this visit of the Gentile Princes, even if no special illumination on the subject had been granted to this Blessed Mother.

It is most likely that these Wise Kings inherited the original prophecy made in Paradise about the Woman and her Seed, as well as the twofold prediction of Balaam about the Star and the Sceptre. Their question, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" implies that they expected to find the Mother with the King. Thus they would naturally pay due honour and reverence to Mary, as well as the adoration and worship which they offered to her Son. The gold and frankincense and myrrh must have been placed in her hands, and she must have been treated by them in all respects as a Queen. Their simple penetrating faith found nothing to blunt it in all the circumstances of poverty, humiliation, and suffering in which they found the Royal Child, and they went away on their journey homewards with the image of the Mother and the Child imprinted in their hearts, the representation to them of the ineffable mercy of God on the human race.

If we try to enter into the heart of our Blessed

Lady with regard to this mystery of the Epiphany, we may find a few points which are worthy of attention. In the first place, it must have been an extremely great joy to her to see our Lord honoured by those great ones of the earth. Not that any homage of theirs could be really worthy of Him, nor could it increase its value that it was paid to Him by those who were conspicuous for the false glitter of earthly grandeur and position. The homage of a pure and humble heart is more pleasing to Him than all the honour that can be paid Him by earthly greatness. But it was well that earth and the human race should offer to Him of their best, and as He has ordained the various ranks and stations of human society, and as those who rule do so in His Name and by His authority, it was well that those who have received most from Him in this way should humble themselves before Him. Up to this time, He had admitted but few to His presence but the poor and lowly, the holy priest and the religious widow serving God in the sanctuary day and night. The world had ignored Him and neglected Him. Now some great ones were to be found to compensate for this neglect. Moreover, they came from afar, at their own great cost and labour, and their coming stirred up the whole population, and so attracted great attention for the moment to the Holy Child. But more precious than all else in the eyes of our Lord, and so also in the eyes of His Mother, were the deep faith, the strong and courageous virtues, the resolute perseverance, the simplicity which nothing could scandalize, of those illustrious saints.

Besides this, it is not easy to think that our Lady was ignorant who they were, nor that they represented before the feet of our Lord the whole Gentile world. That was a world for which God had done very much, and for which He was to do more. It had not the special privileges which were the heritage of the holy nation, but it had its own heritage of ancient traditions, the teaching of nature, the law of conscience, the tender government of Providence revealing the fatherly care of God. He had never, even in its darkest moments, altogether abandoned it, or left Himself without witness to it, and He intended it to share most largely and gloriously in the blessings now brought into the world by the Son of Mary. These blessings were sketched out in the most glowing language by some of the prophets, and these descriptions must have been well known to our Blessed Lady. Even if she had no further knowledge of the future of these glorious saints, and of the Churches which they were to adorn, she might well imagine what the grand history might be of which the Epiphany was the first passage. The thought of the faithful care of the Creator for the whole race of man would fill her with love, admiration, and thankfulness.

Again, the presence of these Wise Kings was the representation, both to our Lord and our Blessed Lady, of an immense new world over which He was to reign as Redeemer and King. They paid Him the solemn homage due to Him as God and also as Man, and their gifts testified to the clearness and penetration of their faith as to His Work and Person. The offering of the myrrh, in particular, has always

been considered as showing an anticipation of the Sacred Passion. Our Blessed Lady was to be, in the sense of which the saints speak, the Mother of all the Redeemed by her Son, and she entered on this office, as we may say, with regard to the Gentile world, at this mystery of the Epiphany. Here again was a great source of joy and gratitude, that God was to give Him the heathen as His inheritance and the utmost parts of the earth as His possession, that the subjects of His Kingdom were to be so numerous and various, rendering to Him so much honour and service, and for all this vast realm Mary was to feel a mother's care and love.

Out of this thought flows another, which may be mentioned here for the first time, although there has been occasion for its occurrence in some of the earlier mysteries of the Infancy. As all that passed before our Lady's eyes in these successive manifestations of our Lord was meant to be to her a fresh revelation of God and our Lord, and a fresh subject to her of praise, wonder, joy, and thanksgiving, so also was all that passed meant to furnish her with fresh matter for her most powerful intercession. Every one who came before her to adore or to honour our Lord, was at once a fresh invitation to her to pour forth her prayer. It was as much her work in the Kingdom to be a perpetual and unwearied intercessor for men as it was to be a perpetual adorer and praiser of God. Thus the shepherds had earned her prayers at the Nativity, Simeon and Anna at the Purification, the friends and relatives who had greeted them, on their return at Nazareth. And now the whole Gentile world, as it were, came to

her feet at Bethlehem, and every holy instinct of her most tender heart was moved to pray for all blessings on these simple and noble souls, who were afterwards to be so distinguished in the preaching of the Gospel, and for the whole multitudes of men who might be invited to God and the knowledge of our Lord by their means.

We have thought of our Blessed Lady as occupied with immense fruit and energy in the contemplation of the wonders of God, the revelations made concerning Him and His ways in Sacred Scripture, in the worship and solemn services of the sanctuary, and other such employments of the mind and heart, very holy in themselves, and such are or may be the occupations of any child of God in the Church. She is especially set in His Kingdom as our pattern in all the homage and reverence which we owe to our Incarnate Lord, as He is our great pattern in all the worship which we owe to His Eternal Father. Her intelligence concerning Him under all that variety of relations to us on which devout souls love to dwell, naturally grew as time advanced, even from the beginning, although the great times for this manifestation were naturally the Public Life, the Passion, and the Risen Life. It is then that He sets Himself before us as Captain, and King, Teacher and Legislator, the Shepherd and the Spouse of souls, our Life, our Light, our Guide, our Judge. Each of these offices of His implies a correspondence of intelligent and grateful homage from us. In all these respects we have a priceless boon in our Blessed Lady, who is not, as some writers would make her, hidden altogether

from our sight and kept in a world of her own, apart from ours, but, with all her incomparable dignity, our model and our guide in matters which come across us as duties or opportunities, day after day. These occupations of hers are ours also, nor can there be any which raise us more powerfully to God, which expand, enlarge, ennoble, spiritualize our souls so much as these. They are the highest and, at the same time, the most legitimate, occupations for heart and mind.

This office of intercessory prayer for others, in particular, is a duty which His devout children owe to God, Who has given them the power of prayer, and Who intends the great operations of His grace in the Church to be set in motion and urged on by its use. Thousands of most wonderful blessings are daily descending from Heaven in answer to prayer. But, if it is our duty, and the appointed means by which the streams of His beneficence are to be opened and poured forth, it is also an occupation most fruitful of blessings to ourselves. For it gives us aims, objects, purposes, interests, views, judgments, aspirations, which are above the things of the world, at the same time that it makes our hearts most tender and large and compassionate and full of sympathy even for the least of temporal and physical troubles. It knits our hearts to God and to man as nothing else can. Men grow in spiritual stature, in loftiness of thought, in intensity of charity, by the habit of intercession. And when we are trying to give to ourselves some poor account of the advances and ascensions even of the Blessed Mother of God, we must not forget that what is true

of other such exercises is true also of this. It is productive of the greatest and most rapid advances to those who know best how to use it, and who are faithful in acting on their knowledge. It was therefore a means of immense grace to Mary, who was in its use most faithful as well as most powerful.

And again, we must not leave this mystery of the Epiphany without repeating what has to be said of all such mysteries. Apart from all the fruits that our Lady must have gained by her faithfulness in the use of her opportunities and the marvellous revelations of God's ways which were set before her mind, it was a great step onwards in the unfolding of the dispensation of the Incarnation, and as such an occasion for a fresh outpouring of gratuitous graces on her who had so large a part in the administration of that dispensation.

CHAPTER VII.

MARY IN EGYPT.

THE mystery of the Epiphany was followed, as we know, immediately by the Flight into Egypt, which had been decreed by the Eternal Father for designs of His own, in order that His Incarnate Son might fulfil the prophecies, and for other reasons also. We have here mainly to try to enter into the plans of Heaven only so far as they affected our Lady in particular, though of course she was not separated from her Son in the arrangements of Providence. It is easy to see at the outset how much of suffering this decree of Providence must have entailed for her and St. Joseph, as well as for the Sacred Humanity of our Lord, Who chose to suffer as any other child would suffer under such circumstances. The journey must have had its perils and alarms, even when we take into consideration the perfect faith of Mary and Joseph in the Divine protection. That faith did not preclude them from all anxiety, especially that nothing might be wanting on their part to secure the safety of their charge. The sword of Herod was a real danger, and as long as they were on the road to Egypt, till they were outside the boundaries of Palestine, they must have felt great alarm lest they might be recognized by some of the

emissaries of the cruel King. There were many other dangers on such a journey, and when they at last reached the land of exile, they were safe indeed from the danger from which they were flying, but not from the many trials and straits of their poor and friendless condition in an unknown land.

These circumstances were the occasion to the Blessed Mother for the exercise of a number of beautiful virtues, of resignation, humility, confidence in God, and self-abandonment to His holy designs. When they had arrived in the land of Egypt they seem to have fixed their abode in the neighbourhood of the city of Heliopolis, where they would find many of their own nation settled, and not far from which was the famous Temple raised by the Egyptian Jews as a kind of substitute to them, in so far as that was possible, for the sacred Temple of Jerusalem. That this should have been done at all proves the devotion of the Jews of the Dispersion to the centre of their religion in the Holy Land. It was among these Jews of the Dispersion, as they are called, that the Holy Family seems to have sojourned for awhile, and we thus see our Lord and His Blessed Mother drawn into personal contact and neighbourhood with a class of their fellow-countrymen who were in many respects very distinct from the Jews of Palestine itself. It was from this class that came subsequently many of the most famous preachers of Christianity in the Apostolic age, such as St. Paul and St. Barnabas, the famous Apollo mentioned in the Acts and the Epistles, and a great many others. Without being in any way separatist from the national faith and

worship, they were yet far more familiar with the Gentile modes of thought and habits of life, than the Jews of Palestine. Thus they were more likely than others to be available instruments of the Church when the time came for the Gospel to be freely preached to the Gentiles.

Some of these Jews, probably from the very fact that they did not live in the Holy Land, were even more inclined to exaggerate the difference between Jew and Gentile than others. But still, when once converted, they had many qualities which fitted them peculiarly for the work of evangelizing the heathen. The preparation of the Gentile world for the preaching of the Gospel had been in great measure entrusted by Providence to these Jews of the Dispersion, who had been settled all over the Greek and Roman world, first by the policy of the successors of Alexander and then by the tendency of the Jewish people themselves to spread into foreign countries, without giving up their national religion or habits of life, and without severing themselves from the national centre at Jerusalem, whither they continually sent large sums of money and which many of them frequently visited. It was by a continuation of this Providence that the Jews of the Dispersion and their many proselytes of various grades, who owed their knowledge of the true God to them, were used for the propagation of the Gospel in its earlier age.

We have not the slightest hint to guide us as to any intercourse between the Holy Family, while in Egypt, and this large and prosperous class of Jews already settled there. In truth we have no

hint of anything at all concerning the sojourn in Egypt, except the simple fact that they were there, and probably in the part of the country to which we refer, and which was by no means the only part in which the Jews were settled. In Alexandria itself they formed a large part of the population, and had great influence. It is only conjecture that enables us to suppose that the Holy Family may have received some kind hospitality from those of their own nation. But it does not need any conjecture to assure us that the existence of this large body of the children of the chosen nation must have been well known to our Lady and St. Joseph. Our Lord's Sacred Heart indeed was continually watching over them all, as well as the rest of His flock of the holy nation elsewhere, as He was also vigilant in prayer for the poor heathen and idolaters who formed by far the greatest portion of the population of Egypt. But it is probable that one of the reasons in the Providence of God for which this sojourn in Egypt was ordained, was that our Blessed Lady might become acquainted personally with the circumstances under which so large a body of the holy nation were now living in the land in which their forefathers had been in bondage, in order that her tender and compassionate heart might be moved by their condition and perhaps also by their hospitality to take them into her prayers and make them the subjects of her intercession. She had already gained a large increase, so to speak, of the children of her prayers, by the visit of the holy Kings, which had left behind it in her heart an immense pity for the heathen nations whom they represented, as well

as for their own persons. As she passed as a fugitive out of the Holy Land she must probably have heard of the cruel fate of the innocent children at Bethlehem, and her prayers must have risen for them in their suffering and for their afflicted mothers in their bereavement. Now when she found herself among her own countrymen in Egypt, a new portion of the Jewish world set down by Providence in the midst of the heathen, these also would naturally claim their place in her heart and in her prayers. Thus the range of her sympathies and intercessions was continually enlarged by fresh experience, until she came to take into her heart the whole number of various peoples and languages of which the Kingdom of her Son was to be made up.

But if Mary was thus touched by sympathy for these Jews of the Dispersion, in many respects raised so far above the populations all around them in point of religious privileges, what must have been the tenderness and intensity of her compassion for the poor heathen among whom she found herself for the first time? When St. Paul afterwards found himself for a short time at Athens, we are told that his spirit was stirred within him at seeing the city wholly given to idolatry.¹ The idolatry of Athens was refined and almost pure by the side of the degradation and filthiness of the Egyptian superstitions, and in the midst of these our Lady had to live, not for a few days only, but for a certain length of time, perhaps even for years. She had with her in her arms the Lord of all, and there daily before His very Presence He was insulted by

¹ Acts xvii. 16.

the worship of false gods, the deifications of the lowest vices and lusts, and even the animal creation was elevated to the honours of worship at the hands of men made after His own image. Nothing could be more loathsome than the idolatry of Egypt, nothing more calculated to provoke the indignation of the followers of the true God, Who might have been tempted to call down fire from Heaven to put an end to such abominations. But the sight did not cause such feelings in the Blessed Mother of God. It enabled her to understand more perfectly the infinite love and condescension of our Lord in making Himself the Victim to expiate such detestable foulness and degradation in the race whose nature He had taken on Himself, to see their need of redemption, and what a work it was that her Son had undertaken.

Our Lady could understand also that even in that mass which appeared so wholly given up to the worst superstitions, there might be many in whose hearts some love of right and of truth remained unimpaired, some in whom lingered the earliest traditions of the human race about God, some who were stirred by strangely powerful thoughts about the duty which they owed to an unknown but most powerful and merciful Father, some strivings to obey the light that was in them, to listen to the warnings of conscience, some longings for the answer to questions which they could not help asking concerning the future and the unseen. The children who played about the door of the cottage in which her own Treasure was to be found, must have moved her compassion by the traits of inno-

cence and natural virtue which she could discern in them, and her compassion for such must have kindled her prayers to Heaven with fresh fervour. The words of the Canticle of holy Zachary may have come back to her over and over again, speaking of the mission of the "Orient from on high" which had visited them, to enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and guide their feet into the way of peace. Thus, within a comparatively short space of time, our Lord's Presence was brought home to the Gentile world of the far East which visited Him in the persons of the Wise Kings, to the large masses of the Jews of the Dispersion, out of whom so many were to become members of His Church in after years, and also to the degraded heathen population of Egypt. For all of these our Blessed Lady was moved by this arrangement of Providence to interest and exert herself, as the Mother of the Redeemer, Who was as yet an apparently helpless Infant in her arms.

Thus, without more than the simple incidents of her history to guide us, we begin to see how the Providence of God was continually opening wider and wider fields for the powerful intercession of Mary. She had but to correspond faithfully, according to the irrepressible instincts of her sanctity, to the opportunities afforded to her intense and boundless charity, and her heart enlarged itself more and more by the contemplation of fresh objects for thanksgiving to God and of compassion towards men. The sojourn in Egypt must have been a time of immense grace to her, if only on account of the lofty virtues which she was called on to practise,

of all the continual and most loving services which she was rendering to her Son, and the advance of her soul from perpetual intercourse with Him. There were also many crosses and many trials incidental on the condition of strangers in such a country. Perhaps also there were many occasions of acts of kindness and sympathy by which the Holy Pilgrims won the hearts of the people with whom they were brought in contact, many examples of virtue intelligible even to the benighted but simple peasants among whom they lived. All these things may have been occasions of grace to our Blessed Lady, who was sure not to let miss any opportunity which might make her more pleasing to God or more useful and helpful to men.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOME AT NAZARETH.

AT some date, after the sojourn of the Holy Family in Egypt had lasted for a considerable time, though how long that time may have been cannot be certainly settled, the death of the wicked persecutor Herod put an end to the Providential necessity for their absence from their home. St. Joseph, it seems, would naturally have settled in Bethlehem, and perhaps our Blessed Lady's love for the spot where our Lord had been born, and for the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, may have had some influence in making him wish this. They would probably have had far fewer friends in Bethlehem than in Nazareth, and their great love for retirement, in which they would be more free from interruption and criticism as to their behaviour towards our Lord, may thus have come in to add another motive to their wish. But it was decreed by Providence that our Lord should be called a Nazarene. And for the execution of this decision it was necessary that he should be brought up in His Mother's home at Nazareth. The fear of Archelaus was the moving cause which made St. Joseph alter his plan, and thus we now find ourselves at the beginning of that longest period of

the Life of our Lord which we commonly call the Hidden Life, and which was spent by Him in Nazareth.

We all know that this part of our Lord's Life is the part concerning which the Evangelists have been guided to say the fewest possible words. A short passage in St. Luke, which bears evident internal signs of having been communicated to him by our Lady herself, contains all that we are told concerning this time, if we except a few words put into the mouth of the people of Nazareth, when the account is given of their low estimate of our Lord Himself, and in which He is called the carpenter, and the carpenter's Son. This is the most obvious example in the Gospel narrative of the Divine method by which so many things on which we should like to feed our thoughts, are either passed over in complete silence, or mentioned only with the utmost brevity. Those who study the Life of our Lord in the spirit in which the Gospels are written, do not find that these few words are so easily exhausted in their meaning and significance as to make them feel that they have a right to ask for more.

If we ask ourselves for something which may help us in the object of this work, which is to set before ourselves some considerations to guide us as to the successive stages of the immense and continual ascensions of our Blessed Lady to graces and blessings ever higher and higher, we find a great deal on which we may dwell which is to some extent fresh, but we find also that we have reached a point in her life at which her advance in grace and

consummate perfection consisted in great measure rather in the intense use of the gifts already received than in that of occasions altogether new. This must be always remembered in giving ourselves an account of her marvellous history, that there may have been certain points therein at which her sphere of action was enlarged, and that in this sense her graces expanded in new manifestations, but that these did not imply any cessation in the constant exercise of virtues which had come into play at an earlier period of her career. She used all her first graces continually, as long as there was any field for them. But she used also, as time went on, other graces which were then brought out, if we may so say, for the first time.

Thus it was that our Lady's perpetual contemplation of God and His excellencies, her direct study of our Lord as He manifested Himself to her in the successive mysteries of the Infancy, her most diligent and rapturous exercise of praise and gratitude, her careful ministrations to our Lord as entrusted to her, her most fervent intercessions for the success of the great work of Redemption in the classes of souls which were brought before her in the providential arrangement of the history, were occupations of her soul which were never laid aside. She was as diligent in these at Nazareth as she could be in Egypt or at Bethlehem. The successive scenes in which she was placed by Divine Providence did not supersede those which preceded them in her large-hearted mercifulness and her gratitude to God. Thus, when we see reason for chronicling something as new in the

advance of her grace or of the occupations suggested to her in the providential course of events, we do not mean that she laid aside her former interests or activity in other regions of God's service, but only that the onward course of her life was most beautifully ordered, so that new duties and labours were put before her most faithful soul, as those which were in keeping with the particular stage of her career at which she found herself for the time being. No grace that she had ever received passed away unfruitful from the soul of Mary, and her interior activity became ever wider and deeper, instead of merely transferring its industry into new fields in which it might display itself.

Thus it must not surprise us if we have but little new to say about the Hidden Life, which must notwithstanding have been a time of immense progress on the part of this Blessed Mother. It is most true that there were but few external incidents to record. One day in such a life must have been externally very like another. When there are no landmarks to catch the eye of the voyagers over a boundless ocean, the objects that meet their gaze day after day are so absolutely identical that they might think that they were making no progress, while all the time the great ship might be flying through the waters towards her destination at immense speed. Thus during this tranquil time of not far short of thirty years, when there are so few incidents to recount, the advance of Mary by means of the graces and offices which had now become familiar to her can be known only to God. It was not a time without its special occupations either for our

Lord or for His Blessed Mother, and the consideration of these and of her part therein must suffice us in the present chapter.

The greatest of all the differences between this period and those which have preceded it is one which is the result of the commonest of all causes, and in this the Life of our Lady cannot have been in any way exceptional. The great epoch to all young mothers is that at which their child begins to be able to converse with them, to express his thoughts in words of his own, to take part in conversation, to understand the world around him, and to begin that long process, as it is with us in our present condition, in which the education of the mind and intelligence consists. We have supposed that our Lord did not begin to speak at the moment of His Birth. But we must be certain that He was then as ever perfect Man in the command of all His faculties, and that if He did not manifest this to all around Him, it was because it was more fitting for Him to be like all other infants in this respect also, as far as was possible for Him so to be. Some contemplatives delight in thinking that to His Mother at all events He relaxed this rule so far as to converse with her freely from the beginning. It is enough for us to know that this might have been so. Others have supposed that Mary was always allowed to understand in a certain measure, at all events, the movements of His Sacred Heart, and that He communicated to her in some marvellous manner all, or a part of, that which was passing therein. They suppose that this gift to her was continued ever afterwards during the Life of our Lord, although

it might have been interrupted occasionally for some particular purpose of God.

But we are on indisputable ground when we say that at some point of the Infancy our Lord must have begun, like other children, to converse with His Blessed Mother and with St. Joseph, and that His conversation must have been from the very first most tender and loving with them. They knew Who He was, and therefore there could have been nothing in all their converse with Him that was inconsistent with the most perfect reverence and devotion on their part. But at the same time there could not have been in Him any keeping back of the affection, the gratitude, the obedience, the loving openness and familiarity which was due from Him to His Mother and to him who was in all earthly matters His father and in the place of God. Few as are the words of our Blessed Lady recorded in the Gospels for us, they are quite enough to show us that she conversed with her Son as His Mother might naturally converse, and we have the whole that has come down to us as to the relations between Him and His Apostles, to prove that He exacted from them none of the ceremonial of homage and silence which is to be found in earthly courts.

If our Lord had been only one of the great saints of God, such as St. John Baptist or others, His conversation with His parents from His earliest years must have been treasured by those with whom He lived as the greatest privilege of their lives, one which gave them unexampled opportunities of advancing in the knowledge of the ways of God, and in particular, of the great dispensation of His

Wisdom and Mercy in the Incarnation. But our Lord was far more than any of His Saints in Divine Wisdom and intelligence, and the blessed pair with whom He dwelt for these long years of the Hidden Life were more fitted than any others could be to derive both grace and enlightenment from any conversation which He might hold with them concerning the designs and ends of God in sending Him into the world. For it is reasonable to think that He was always desirous to communicate such truths to souls that were fit to receive them. This is one of the meanings of His saying that He was the Light of the World. When He went forth to preach among the people, to deal with their rulers and teachers, and even when for so many months together He made the Twelve Apostles His close and intimate companions, He met with darkness on every side, with hearts in many cases shut against the light, because their deeds were evil, in other cases with hearts only very partially open to the streams of light which He had to impart. It must have been one of the greatest of the trials of the Sacred Heart to have so much to communicate concerning God, to know the intrinsic value of the truth and the benefits which it laid open to souls, and yet to find even in those who were the least unready to receive it so much positive unreadiness and unfitness.

So it must have been during the three years of the Public Life, but so it was not during the Thirty Years of the Hidden Life. Our Lord never showed any reluctance to communicate truths concerning God, except to those who could not receive them.

His own words to the Apostles about calling them His friends because He had revealed to them the secrets of His Father, about the many things which He had still to tell them which they could not yet receive, about the office of the Holy Ghost in recalling to their minds what He had said to them, and the like, show how much He delighted in making such revelations. But in Mary, and in a less degree in St. Joseph, there was no impediment to the revelation of what St. Paul calls the "whole counsel of God." Yet if some great saint had been allowed only for a few weeks to be in constant companionship with our Lord, and had during that time been in the habit of familiar conversation with Him on such subjects, we should be prepared to find in that privileged soul treasures of wisdom and knowledge such as would raise him to the highest rank among the Cherubim. But such was the privilege of our Blessed Lady for the whole time of the Hidden Life, beginning from the moment, whenever it was, at which our Lord began to converse with her. There is therefore very good reason for the contemplations of such writers as the famous Maria de Agreda, who tells us that during this period of the Hidden Life our Blessed Lady became the first disciple, so to say, of our Lord, Who unfolded to her in the course of that happy time the chief features of the Divine plan of the Kingdom which He was to found.

That it should so have been will seem, to devout and thoughtful souls, the most natural thing in the world, when we remember the immense graces which our Lady had received from the first, her wonderful

insight into the ways of God, as shown in her Canticle, the deep study which she had made of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, as well as the large share she had and was to have in the execution of the Divine dispensation for the redemption of the world. We are told in Genesis that God said of Abraham, "Can I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that He shall become a great and mighty nation, and that in him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed?"¹ Yet Mary, as the Mother of the redeemed, was to become a mightier nation than Abraham, and in her it was indeed true that all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, and she herself was to be called blessed by all generations. Again, St. Paul writes to the Ephesians, "For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of Whom all paternity in Heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened by His Spirit with might unto the inward man, that Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts, that being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge, and to be filled unto all the knowledge of God."² If the Apostle could pray thus so earnestly for the converts of a few years, it is not extravagant to think that our Lord might desire to communicate to His Blessed Mother all the treasures of the Divine counsel.

It would be to the honour of God that there should

¹ Gen. xviii. 17.

² Ephes. iii. 14, seq.

fully, and which in our Lady's case came, as we believe, direct from the conversations and contemplations of the Hidden Life at Nazareth.

It would be far too great an undertaking for a work like this to endeavour to set out, even if this could be done with any reasonable certainty, the details of these communications concerning the Gospel Law which our Lord may now have made to her. The contemplative to whom reference has been made has several beautiful chapters on this great subject. She tells us how our Blessed Lady was instructed in the Christian Creed, the Commandments in their Christian meaning, the Gospel Law as contained in the Beatitudes, the Sacramental System of the Church, and the like, how she corresponded and cooperated with the knowledge imparted to her, and how she became the companion and assistant of our Lord in the prayers which He was continually pouring forth for the work which He was to begin at the end of this period for the instruction and salvation of the race of mankind. Such are the natural subjects on which our Lord would love to instruct her who was to share so largely in all the fruits of His work, and also to aid so greatly in extending them to others.

Instructions of the kind which is here supposed were to a certain extent general in their character, and they would refer more to the future of the work of our Lord in the world, than to that part of it on which all the future was to be built as on its foundation, what He had already done since the Incarnation, and what He was actually engaged in during these long years of His retirement at Nazareth. It

be, as soon as possible, a heart and soul among pure creatures that could understand the immense riches of wisdom and love contained in the Gospel plan, a heart and soul of the largest capacity of intelligence and of praise and gratitude and correspondence equal to its intelligence. It would be an immense consolation and joy to the Sacred Heart, when our Lord could share the joy and delight He felt in the beautiful work committed to Him with her whom He loved with so singular a love, and who could add to His joy and delight in sharing them and reflecting them. It was well that here also Mary should be His companion, and that the gifts of knowledge and intelligence which were afterwards to be distributed so largely to the saints should first of all be communicated to her. And it was a blessing also to the Church, and especially the Church of the Apostles' age, that she should be so full of this knowledge of the ways of God. For the rulers and guides of the Church are always divinely enlightened, and they have in their hands that precious gift of the indefectible doctorate which enables them faithfully to enlighten the Christian people from time to time on all points as to which doubt may arise. But the doctorate itself constantly looks to the instincts and holy beliefs, the sense of the faithful people, pastors and flocks, and especially to the keen clear gaze with which the saints of God contemplate the eternal truths. Mary, of course, was singularly enlightened, and more than all the saints, but she stands at the beginning of the history of the Church as "a mountain of light," representing the Christian instincts and traditions which help her so power-

is natural to suppose that He would not leave our Lady without instruction and special enlightenment on these subjects. He may well have taught her positively, what she had already divined in the musings of her own faithful mind and heart, such things as the reason for the Incarnation, or as the time and manner of its accomplishment, or the Providential guidance of herself and of St. Joseph all through their lives. He may have explained to her the Divine reasons for the Birth at Bethlehem, the decree of Augustus, the summons of the Wise Kings from the East, the permission of the slaughter of the Innocents, and the Flight into Egypt. She may have learnt from Him the meaning of all His teachings from the Crib, His love for poverty and humiliation and pain, and the blessing which she had in sharing all these things with Him, and also the peculiar grace which had been bestowed upon her in the prophecy of Simeon and the sword of grief of which it had spoken. Let us add a few words as to her intelligence as to that beautiful part of our Lord's work which we may consider, in a certain sense, proper to this time.

Our Lady could not but have been aware that our Lord came to found a Kingdom in the world. Indeed it was this His kingly character and work which had been specially set before her by the Angel at the Annunciation. The Kingdom was indeed the Kingdom of Heaven, but it was to have its external state and greatness and power, it was not merely to transfer men as quickly as possible to another world without creating something stable and most beautiful in this. He Who was to be

the Saviour of the Jews and of the Gentiles, of those who had been represented before Him by the Sages from the East, and by the Idolaters in Egypt, as well as by the Jews whether of Palestine or of the Dispersion, was to leave behind Him the elements of a society in which He was to reign, the true House of Jacob, and in which His Kingdom was to have no end, as long as the world lasts. We who live at the end of so many centuries since the time of our Lord's sojourn upon earth, can see at least some of the chief principles of the society which was to be founded and ruled by Him. We can see that His own life was meant to be in a great measure its model and its foundation, that every feature of strength and stability which belongs to it is traceable to some feature in His own life, in which He had left a blessing behind Him for those who were to be His subjects in successive generations. The reason why men are inclined to wonder as they do at the comparative inactivity of our Lord during this part of His stay in the world, and at the great length of time which He spent in doing nothing that seems to them extraordinary, must be that they do not appreciate the importance of common life, or of the work which our Lord had to do in the world to lay the foundations of Christian society.

Our Lady must have shared His thoughts and been instructed in them, and it would not be much to suppose that, with all the immense advances of grace and wisdom which must have been the fruit of her faithfulness in cooperating with graces already received, she might have been even otherwise enough

enlightened to see that what was going on in the holy House was the consecration, by the touch and presence of the Incarnate God, of the elements and principles out of which Christian society was to be formed and on which it was to be built. This had already been done as to the several parts of which the Christian home is made up. That is, our Lord had consecrated the relations between parents and children by becoming a Child, between husbands and wives by being born of a virgin wife, He had blessed and hallowed poverty and common life, from His first entrance into the world, He had honoured law by obeying the mandate of Cæsar, He had blessed labour by living on the work of His foster Father in Egypt. But in the Hidden Life all these elements are brought together, and they form the chief and essential features in that Life, as it was led for thirty years. There is the home of the artisan, there are the parents and the Child, the husband and the wife, there is the thrifty and laborious poverty of persons content with their station in life and with no ambition to rise above it. As we shall see, there is room in that life for the school and other elements of education. There is even room for the doctrine of those Divine vocations which warn parents that their children do not belong to them but to God. The life of the whole is obedience, and it is lit up by the constant practice of prayer and communion with God.

If all these things in the Hidden Life were so because our Lord wished to consecrate by His own touch and practice that holy common life of the society which He was to found, it seems natural

to think that His Blessed Mother, who was to so great an extent one with Him and a partner, as far as that was possible, in His work, should have been enlightened to understand all this work of His and to bear therein her own conscious and deliberate share. If her heart was not united to His own by some wonderful gift which enabled her to read and follow all that went on therein, at least it was gifted by the instincts of the same Holy Spirit Who directed all the movements of the Sacred Humanity. It was the most faithful of created souls to that Divine guidance, while at the same time it was her vocation to be the companion of all our Lord's thoughts and intentions, as far at least as it lay within her capacity to understand and to further them by her own. Nor was she merely the saint of saints, the soul that had received more largely than any other of the fruits of His Redemption. She was His Mother who had consented to the execution of the counsel of the Incarnation within her womb, and who was made by her union with Him, in the designs of God, the Mother of His redeemed and the Queen where He was King.

In the light of these considerations we find it most difficult to think that our Lady, in her practice of all the most perfect virtues, in which she imitated our Lord during this long period of the Hidden Life, did not understand fully the great work in which she was bearing a part for the formation of the Kingdom of her Son. We find it difficult to think that this great object did not enter into her prayers and form the subject-matter of her intercessions. At least we can be certain that she followed most

lovingly every example of perfection in her Blessed Child, studying Him with ever-increasing wonder as He passed from the age of a child to that of a youth, and then on to fullgrown manhood, which He had long attained before the time came for the ending of His Hidden Life. This Life was broken by one most remarkable incident, in which our Lord seemed for the moment to deviate from the line of conduct which He followed during the remainder of the time, and of which, as far as it regards our Blessed Lady, we may speak fully in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY OF THE TWELFTH YEAR.

THE single incident by the mention of which the short history of the Hidden Life is broken in the narrative of St. Luke is, as is well known, the tarrying of our Lord in the Temple of Jerusalem, when He was of the age of twelve years, and when He did not let His Mother or St. Joseph know where He was, or the motive of His absence from their side. This mystery has two different aspects, as it is considered with reference to our Lord's work for the glory of the Father on the one hand, or to our Blessed Lady and His treatment of her on the other. We have spoken elsewhere of the first of these two aspects of this incident.¹ It seems that our Lord desired to show, among other things, His immense devotion to the work of instruction, especially to that most important but less conspicuous branch of instruction which is carried on in the catechetical schools of the Church. He wished to set an example, both to teachers and to scholars, in such schools, and to consecrate by His own presence and participation the labour of the one and the docility of the other. He could hardly leave behind Him a more conspicuous proof of the value which the school held

¹ See *The Thirty Years*, chs. xvii. xviii.

in His eyes, than by making this the one occasion on which He departed, in so pointed a manner, from His usual habit of close and obedient clinging to the company of those who were to Him in the place of God, and were intensely dear on all grounds. Other motives may also have had their share in determining His conduct on this occasion, and also in the provision which He has made for the preservation of this incident in the history, when so many other most interesting occurrences must have been passed over in silence. But we need not dwell on this part of the subject here.

When we turn to consider this action of our Lord, and all that passed in consequence, with reference to our Blessed Lady, we see in the first place that, if our Lord had simply intended us to learn by His example the great importance of the catechetical teaching of which mention has been made, there was no need for all that part of the incident which relates to the ignorance in which our Blessed Lady was left by Him, and the sorrow which she and St. Joseph must have felt in finding that He was absent from them, and in their search for Him. It must be quite certain that if He had expressed to them the slightest wish to remain in Jerusalem for those three days, there could have been no opposition on their part to His desire. They would willingly have remained with Him, and then their witness to His desire to spend the time as He did spend it would have remained to the Church, without any narrative of the sorrows of our Lady and the tearful search for Him which she had to make. The one most remarkable point in the mystery is not that He

spent His time in the Temple or in the school, but that He left our Lady and St. Joseph, without a word of warning, because He was called to something which belonged to that work of His Father which He came into the world to do. It is this which seems, more than anything else, to require explanation.

The answer to this question will perhaps reveal to us a new truth concerning our Blessed Lady and the position which she occupies in the history of the Incarnation. We have hitherto considered her in the great exaltation which she received, in consequence of the unique privilege conferred upon her of becoming the Mother of God, and in the display of wonderful virtues which we see in her from the first, which reveals to us something of her pre-eminent personal sanctity. She is the one created soul that was to profit to the very full by the graces and blessings of the Incarnation, to correspond fully to the merciful designs of God in that mystery, to be the perfect and faultless copy of the virtues and the character of her Blessed Son. As the time drew near for the manifestation of our Lord to the world, as far as such manifestation was made in the course of His Public Life, another duty fell, as it seems, into the hands of Mary, which involved, on this and perhaps on other occasions, a certain amount of suffering, which was a part of that piercing of her heart by the sword of which holy Simeon had told her. She was our Lord's only earthly parent, although St. Joseph had over him a certain parental authority of its own kind. Mary was therefore the one person in the world towards whom our Lord

was to behave uniformly in that manner in which it was necessary that He should behave, in order to supply us with a perfect example of the conduct of a Child to His Parents. This was the object of that long example of subjection and obedience which is conveyed to us by what we know of this very period of the Hidden Life. Of this period it is specially mentioned, and, moreover, of the years which followed this mystery of the twelfth year in particular, that He was then subject to His parents. It follows from this that if there were any sphere of conduct or duty as to which obedience to parents, and even consideration for their wishes and feelings, might be out of place in the life of a perfect follower of our Lord, it might be necessary that there should be some example in His Life as to this, in which deviation from uniformity of obedience might be set before us, as the conduct of our Lord Himself. For it would not be well that Christians should be left to conjecture or reasoning in such a matter.

Putting aside for the moment the particular call which our Lord must have followed when He let His parents depart from Jerusalem without warning them that He was to stay behind, this example at least, and in the first place, teaches us that there are some duties which over-ride the duty which we owe to our parents, and that this is the case with all calls and obligations as to which it can be truly said that they constitute or consist in the affairs or the work of the Father. That is, as the ground for our obedience to parents consists in the fact that they are to us in His place, by His will, so there may be special occasions and whole ranges of duties as to which we

may have to put aside the duty to the subordinate authority of the parent, in order to obey the supreme and original authority which resides in God alone. The occasions for such conduct are numberless in life, and they are parallel to those other cases in which the law or command of a legitimate ruler, who has his authority from God, must be set aside in order that we may obey the decrees of God Himself, and of these we may use the words of the Apostles to the rulers of the holy nation, that we must obey God rather than man.²

The parent may conceivably desire the child to commit some sin or do some injustice to a third party, and in such cases the command of parents is to be disobeyed. Another large range of cases is more like this in which our Lord has set us the example, not indeed of disobedience, but of omission to consult the wishes of parents, namely, where there is a case of the child being called by God to serve Him in some state of life which is not what the fond ambition of the parent has marked out for him, and so there is resistance or hindrance on the part of the parent to what we commonly speak of as a clerical or a religious vocation. There have been thousands and thousands of instances in the history of the Church, in which the guidance which has supported the call of God in its rights on the obedience of the child at all costs, even of pain and grief to the parent, has been found in this beautiful mystery of the twelfth year, in which our Lord acted as if it was best to omit all regard to His parents for the sake of obeying a higher and more direct

² Acts iv. 19.

call on His obedience. It may well seem that some such lesson as this was needed to qualify and explain the doctrine of implicit obedience, which might be founded on the most perfect example of our Lord in the practice of that virtue. His example, to be quite perfect and applicable to all possible contingencies, needed the supplement and crown which is supplied to it in this mystery.

If we ask ourselves why our Lord did not content Himself with informing His parents of the call of God which required Him to spend these particular days in this particular way, certain as it was that no opposition could have been raised either by our Blessed Lady or by St. Joseph, the answer seems to be that that example might not have been enough to meet the case of which we are speaking. For the duty of following Divine calls represents them to us as paramount and supreme, the exercise on the part of God of that supreme dominion of His by virtue of which He may dispose of His creatures as He will, for life or for death. For our Lord to have informed our Lady and St. Joseph, would have so far qualified the force of this example, that it might have been said, when appeal was made to this incident in His Life, that He had shown consideration to their rights by asking them or at least informing them of His intention, and it is quite certain they could not have refused their joyful consent. Thus it might have been said that they were consenting. But there were to be many cases in which earthly parents might not act or feel as our Lady and St. Joseph might have felt in this matter, and the true doctrine concerning obedience

to such calls is, not only that parents ought to consent to them, but that they are not even of right to be consulted about them except as persons, like any others, who may have a great interest in their children and may be able to give valuable counsel in cases where the call of God has not been perfectly ascertained.

The example of our Lord on this occasion was to cover even what may be extreme cases, in which parents may be violently opposed to the execution of the Divine call, in which they do not recognize it as such, but consider it a call to something which is actually contrary to God. This is the case constantly with many good Protestant parents, when their children are convinced of the duty of submitting to the Catholic Church. It is very frequently indeed the case, that such parents are tempted to treat their children as undutiful, and thus to claim an authority in a matter which is entirely foreign to their position in the Providence of God. And as the children who are likely to find the claims of the Church paramount, are also likely to be dutiful and modest, there may arise much perplexity and disturbance of conscience for them, which may issue in their letting themselves be persuaded that, the nearest authority to them being that of their parents, they are safe in obeying them in such a matter. In these cases the example of our Lord in this mystery is of the greatest use, and it furnishes the incident in His own Life in which He has practically taught in His own conduct what He afterwards insisted on when He said, *He that loveth father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.*

We may pass on now to the direct example of our Blessed Lady in this mystery of her life, as to which she seems to have been purposely left in a kind of darkness as to our Lord's meaning which was not fully cleared up at once. If we consider her virtues in the whole course of these eventful days, she is in the first place an example to us of devotion to the sanctuary, and of love for the sacred festivals and seasons of the Church. It does not appear that the women among the Jews were obliged by the precept, like the men, to attend at the festivals. But to her every such occasion would be the greatest of privileges, which she would never miss if she could possibly be present. It is probable also that her immense recollection and absorption in the worship of God in the Temple may have been in part the cause of her ignorance of the fact that our Lord had left her. The next point in the history is the sudden and most piercing blow which fell on her when the discovery was made, while at the same time we may be sure that it was now as it was afterwards on many occasions in the Public Life, and most of all at the Passion, that she bore with perfect tranquillity and without losing her internal peace and union with God and His will, the severe trial of the time of separation. In her readiness to fear that she might be in some measure in fault herself for the losing of our Lord, in her diligence in searching for Him without any delay, in her patience under repeated disappointments, in the care with which she comforted her afflicted spouse, and her calm wondering consideration of the ways of Providence, she becomes a perfect model for souls who

have in any way or measure lost that habitual presence of, and familiarity with, our Lord, in which many of His servants continually live.

There is much also to be learnt from her demeanour when her Child was at last found, for she does not seem to have interrupted the lesson that was going on or to have shown publicly any exaggeration of feeling. Again, there is perfect simplicity in her question to our Lord. She mentions her sorrows without fear, and put her question without hesitation. There is no complaint, but there is a clear and simple petition for light as to the reason of His conduct. And we may be sure from all these intimations of consummate virtue, that there must have been the same perfection in those parts of the Mystery of which we have no direct account given in the Gospel, and that her resignation and submission to the will of God, and her confidence in His love, even under so sudden a cloud of grief, must have been infinitely pleasing in His eyes.

The Evangelist tells us that when our Lord answered that His parents need not have sought Him, because they must have known that He must be occupied with the affairs of His Father, they did not understand what He said. This must mean, not that they did not understand that it was His duty above all things to be at the work set Him for the time by the command or the interests of His Father, for that could not be doubtful to any who knew Him, but that they did not see the connection between His leaving them so abruptly and His faithfulness to His Father's work. What they did not understand was that His devotion to the work

of His Father, implied the necessity of leaving them without warning, or the superfluousness of their anxious search after Him when they missed Him from their side. That is, they did not see that the paramount rights of God over His time and labour might have been taken for granted by them as the sufficient reason for all that He had done. The connection in this case was a truth which was not yet necessary or ripe for promulgation, though the time was to come when it would be most important for the Church that it should be fully understood. When the account of this incident was committed to writing by St. Luke, probably from the reminiscences of our Blessed Lady, the time had indeed come when this principle had to be acted upon continually by the children of the Church and continually enforced by her rulers. Then all things must have seemed clear enough, and many grateful souls must have owed their salvation or their peace to the doctrine founded on this example of our Lord.

This mystery, then, shows us our Blessed Lady in a new aspect, for she has to suffer something in her tenderest affections, something the sharpness of which no one but herself could know, for the sake of the witness which our Lord had to bear to a great principle of Christian life and perfection. It may be considered as a part of her office as the Mother of the redeemed as well as of the Redeemer, that she should have to bear this trial, which was to be so fruitful in light and strength to thousands of souls who were to belong to the Kingdom of her Son. For the sake of securing this witness to the

principle of which we speak, we see that our Lord did not hesitate to plunge in grief, for as much as three days, the heart of the Mother whom He so tenderly loved. These sufferings of Mary were the birthpangs of a thousand times a thousand holy vocations, and we may rate the value of such callings and of faithfulness to them, when we see them purchased by the price at which they were paid for in the tears of this Blessed Mother. Thus she becomes in an especial sense the Mother of such vocations, not only as having had to suffer for their security, but as having won from God by her sufferings the right to protect and watch over them after they have been entered upon. The graces which she may have added to her treasures during these days of suffering must have been immense and splendid, for our Lord was certain to remunerate most largely any cross which a soul so near to Him bore so perfectly. This mystery therefore must mark another great advance in the consummate sanctity of Mary.

CHAPTER X.

EIGHTEEN YEARS.

THE latter portion of the Hidden Life, which begins after the mystery of which we have last spoken, may be considered as in some respects different in character from that which preceded it. It seems that the age of twelve, which our Lord had now reached, was the time at which the young Jews, if they did not exactly enter life for themselves as in ripe manhood, were considered in many respects no longer children, and as able to choose for themselves, in some measure, the path of life along which they were to walk. They were no longer so dependent on their parents as before. If our Lord had been intended, like St. Paul, to follow a course of study in Jerusalem with a view to his future career as a teacher, He might now have left His home for the Holy City. In many respects He would now be considered adolescent, and thus any choice He might now make with regard to the arrangement of His life, would not have been thought an extraordinary assumption of independence on His part.

It is perhaps with some reference to this that the Evangelist has told us, of this last period of the Hidden Life in particular, that He went down with

His parents to Nazareth and was subject unto them. This implies naturally that He did not continue that course which He had adopted on the occasion of this visit to the Temple, but that He returned to His former way of living, and this although He had just shown that He might freely leave them at any moment, in obedience to some call from His Father, He did not actually do this. We must therefore infer that as it had been the call of His Father which had made Him leave them, so now it was the call of His Father that made Him remain with them. For it is impossible to suppose that He would, as it were, have asserted a kind of independence of them, and then return with them, for any other reason than that which had prompted His departure from them for a time. But the Evangelist adds to the statement about His going down with them to Nazareth the other statement that He was subject unto them, as if this required mention, as being the description of the kind of life, which He now adopted after the attainment of the age at which He might have adopted any other. It seems to mean that, instead of following this or that line of conduct, as might have been the case at the age which He had now attained, He chose as His vocation, if we may so speak, as the kind of service to His Father which was the normal and regular conduct for Him during the remainder of the Hidden Life, the line of perfect and continual submission and obedience to His parents. So that while it might have been said of Peter, for instance, that he became a fisherman, or of Nathanael that he became a Scribe, or that Matthew entered the career which

led on to his being a publican, it would be said of our Lord that the line of life which He now adopted was to live in subjection to His parents. He served them with as perfect a submission as if He had taken in their household the place of a hired servant.

This is the marvellous choice of God for His Incarnate Son, not simply when He was a little Child, but when He was in the eyes of the world becoming a fullgrown youth, and drawing on towards manhood. This is the deliberate choice of the Sacred Heart, guided in all things by the Holy Ghost, and it certainly adds an emphasis to this instruction that it should follow so immediately on the narrative of the remaining of our Lord in Jerusalem. There are no details at all given us as to the service and submission which were now exercised, for in such exercises it is not the kind of work that is performed that is important, but only the principle and motive on which the service is rendered. These were as perfect as they could be, whatever it might have been that our Lord was occupied upon out of His submission and obedience. It is this that characterizes the work, and gives it its merit, not the substance of the work itself. Year after year was to roll on, a longer period was to pass than had already elapsed since He became Man in the womb of Mary, and still the same was the answer to the question, what is the Incarnate God occupied upon? The answer was always the same, He is being subject.

In the service of God which is rendered to Him by His saints on earth, it is often said that it is

obedience that is the great virtue of all, planting all other virtues in the soul and preserving them when they are already planted, the great method and most certain security of rapid progress and high perfection. Thus our Lord adopted the most safe and most powerful method of perfection, practising this method as if He had ever fresh heights of perfection to which He aspired to attain, though indeed He could not rise in perfection, having been from the moment of the Hypostatic Union full of all grace and all virtue. But, as we have seen elsewhere, He could grow in the experimental practice of the virtues, and He could manifest more and more the perfection of virtue which was in Him from the beginning. We cannot be wrong in thinking that this choice which He made was made with a view to us, and to instruct us, as nothing else could instruct us, in the value which He attaches to imitation of Himself in this chief and paramount matter.

With regard to our Blessed Lady, who is our more direct subject of consideration here, we may see, in the first place, how wonderfully she must have profited by this most stupendous example of our Lord as to His favourite virtue, the virtue in which she also was so conspicuous a follower of Him. The depths of the humility and subjection which she saw in Him must have revealed to her ever new and new beauties in this great virtue. It may also be remembered that there is no school of humility, after the constant practice of subjection, which admits of greater advance in this virtue than the practice of having to act as Superior over others

better than ourselves. Those who are the confessors of saints must learn immensely from their penitents, and those who are the Superiors of saints are in the same position of great spiritual advantage if they can use their privileges rightly and humbly. Thus we may consider this time as one at which our Blessed Lady would probably have made enormous strides in the knowledge and practice of every virtue, if it were only that during this time she had to act as the Superior of her Son. She would have constantly before her eyes the profound example of humility of which the Apostle speaks when he describes the mind and character of our Lord, the self-annihilation before the Majesty of God, the perpetual humiliation in word and deed and thought, the intense penetration of the truth of the utter worthlessness and nothingness of the creature, who has received every gift from God, and has of his own nothing at all. To this perfect pattern of humility Mary had day after day to be acting as ruler and guide in the place of God. No wonder if there should have been no limit to her self-abasement and humiliation, and to her charity also, for every stage of humility should be a fresh stage of charity, and of closer union with God and of growth in every virtue.

We have supposed that during these long years of the Hidden Life our Blessed Lady, in some way or other, whether entirely preternaturally or by conversation with her Blessed Son, was made acquainted with the principal and characteristic features of the New Law which He was to introduce and the Kingdom which He was about to

found. If the main outlines and principles of the Christian society as such were laid before her, in any way or measure, it is not probable that she would be left in ignorance of the beautiful creations of the religious spirit, which were all to be founded, with whatever variety of individual design, on the virtue of humility, especially on obedience, and on the poverty and chastity of which the Holy House of Nazareth was the home. Such a contemplation would have set before our Blessed Lady the fairest and most fruitful portion of the future Kingdom, rich in treasures of sanctity in itself, and in blessings of example and beneficence for the whole world around it. At all events it must always be a legitimate consolation to the religious soul, to consider how exactly the great principles of the life which it aims at leading for the glory of God are to be found exemplified in the life of the Holy Family at Nazareth. And when our Lady afterwards saw the first shootings of this goodly plant in the garden of the young Church, she might well recognize in this the springing up of a seed that had been first committed to the soil in these years of which we speak.

In this respect we may consider that the years which followed on the mystery of the remaining in the Temple, were more directly significant than the years which preceded them. For it was at this time that our Lord had proclaimed most fully, that every step of His conduct was taken as a distinct fulfilment of some behest of His Father, and in the interest of His Father, and was thus raised above the level of natural duty to that of supernatural

duty. And it was now that the principle and supreme motive of all He did is described as being subjection. These features are not excluded from ordinary Christian lives, but it is in the religious life that they find their most formal and enduring and unvarying expression. Thus when the blessed dwellers in Heaven look down upon the Christian world, and discern there the repetition of what was first practised in Nazareth, they see this in many a Christian home at least partially and intermittently, but they see it embodied and consecrated by an irrevocable dedication to God in the holy homes of the religious life.

There is yet another feature which is to be found in the later years of the Hidden Life, which is constantly repeated in Christian society, and forms an occasion of numberless beautiful charities and self-sacrifices, while it derives its blessing and its charm from its consecration by the Holy Family. For we are told that some years before the close of this blessed time it pleased God to permit His favoured servant St. Joseph to be tried by a succession of serious and painful illnesses, which reduced him to a state of chronic suffering, and made him unable any longer to labour as he had laboured hitherto for the sustenance of the holy home. This dispensation of Providence gave that great saint the opportunity of accumulating new merits daily, by his patience and conformity to the Divine will, while at the same time it enabled our Lady and our Lord to show towards him all the most delicate and tender refinements of the most exquisite charity in their ministrations to him. Thus was suffering of this kind

consecrated in the life of our Lord, and by the active exercise of the most careful devotion by Himself and by His Blessed Mother. If this had not been so, then human life would have lacked this blessing which is involved in the fact that every common office of duty and charity has been hallowed by Him in the course of His sojourn amongst us. Pain, indeed, and hunger and weariness, He has consecrated sufficiently by having undergone them in His own Person, but He could not, or it was not convenient that He should, endure sickness. He has hallowed this too, and also set us the most perfect example of the charity which it ought to call forth in us, both by this feature in the holy years of His home life, and by the tenderness with which He relieved every kind of disease and infirmity when the time came for His mixing among men as the Teacher of truth.

The long illness of St. Joseph ended, as it seems, some few years before the termination of the Hidden Life, and thus it was arranged that our Lord should live for some space of time alone with His Blessed Mother after her bereavement. Christian contemplation has often dwelt with wondering love over the parting moments of the blessed Spouse of Mary, and endeavoured to enter into her sorrow, and to imagine the details of the first and most perfect Christian death-bed. It was then that she became for the first time the Mother of the dying, the special patroness and protector of the children of the Church in the last and most momentous passage of their existence. St. Joseph shows us all the resignation, and patience, and faith, and confidence

in God, which are the virtues which adorn the last time of our trial, when the soul has the opportunity of turning what under our present condition is the necessity of nature, into an occasion of almost priceless merit and homage to the majesty and the justice of God. Our Lord is there, the fountain of all graces whether for life or for death, and our Lady is by His side, with all the boundless efficacy of her intercession for the parting soul. And thus too all our ordinary and natural sorrows are assuaged by finding their echo in the hearts of our Lord and His Mother, whose love for the dying soul was boundless, and whose natural sorrows were in proportion to their love and the closeness of the ties which bound them to the husband and foster-father, by whose side they watched as the moment of death drew nigh.

Such are some of the features which belong more especially to this, the longest and most hidden stage of the existence of our Blessed Lady in the holy home. All that she had learnt and gained in the years which had preceded these formed a part of her life in this period, and the new features of which we have been speaking were added to others which have come more particularly before our sight in the earlier stages of her ministrations to our Lord as His Mother. The Hidden Life was the time which our Lord devoted, under the Providence of His Father, to the preparation for His great work among souls in the way of preaching, instructing, converting, as well as for that which was to come immediately on the close of the Public Life, the work of the Passion for the satisfaction for sin

to the justice of God. This time was also the preparation of our Blessed Lady for the part she was to have in both of these great works, a part not the same as that which He alone could undertake and perform, but nevertheless a part of utmost importance in the designs of God and of utmost fruitfulness to men. Not one of the days of all that long time but had done its part in the increase of her immense sanctification, her intelligence of our Lord and His work, her imitation of Him, and her cooperation with Him. It was to be the same, as we shall see, with the years of His active Life, which was now on the eve of its commencement, and that again was to prepare her for the still more wonderful work which was to be committed to her when the time came for the Passion itself.

BOOK III.

MARY DURING THE PUBLIC LIFE.



CHAPTER I.

INTERIOR OCCUPATIONS OF MARY.

THE time had now come for an entire change in the external aspect of our Lord's existence on earth. He was within four years of the time when He was to offer Himself on the Cross as the Sacrifice for the sins of the world. But before that great act could be accomplished, He had to perform His work as the Teacher of the truth, the Revealer of His Father, the Founder of the Church and of her marvellous system for the salvation and perfection of mankind. Between the quiet years of which we have last been speaking, the thirty years spent mostly in Nazareth, and the actual Passion, there was to come the whole of the wonderful period of activity and contradiction which we call the Public Life of Jesus Christ. It is with this that the Gospel histories are in the main concerned. Indeed, the simplest idea of a Gospel, as we see it in the work of St. Mark, included nothing else, except the Passion itself, and the shortest possible account of the Resurrection. At His Ascension, our Lord left His earthly work to be carried on by the Church under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, and a new stage in the history of His Kingdom began.

It was inevitable that during these three years and

a half of His Ministry our Lord could no longer be the inseparable companion of His Blessed Mother. His Life was to be now a life of continual movement, of great exposure to danger, of constant conflict. And besides, as has already been seen, she was to give Him the opportunity, by His conduct towards and treatment of her on particular occasions, of setting to those who were to be His ministers, throughout all ages of the world, His perfect example of detachment from home ties, from parental influences, and the like, an example which would be much needed by them, and which they could not have practised so well if they had not had this instance of His own setting to look to for light and for strength. It is on this account, as well as on that of the hidden character of her occupations at this time, that we hear so little of our Blessed Lady during the period which is covered by the Gospel history properly so called. The later Evangelists were guided to add the few precious details which we possess relating to the Sacred Infancy and the Hidden Life, in which her part was necessarily not only great, but conspicuous.

It might perhaps turn out, if we knew the facts of the history more fully, that the external separation of our Blessed Lord from His Mother was neither so complete nor so uninterrupted as it may seem to be on a cursory inspection of the sacred narrative. There are large blanks in the history, and as to these it is at least as likely as not that they included sojourns of His by the side of His Mother, of which it was not the purpose of the Gospel writers to speak. But, in any case, the external

separation, whatever was its extent in point of time, did not in any way imply a cessation of that close union of heart and spirit which had been the rule of their lives during the Thirty Years. It was not with our Lord and His Mother as it might be with any good worker in the vineyard of the Church, who leaves his home and family at the cost of a certain pang to his own affectionate heart, but who has been accustomed by the years of his training for the priesthood to live in a world of thoughts and interests and aspirations to which the inmates of that home are more or less strangers. He has his work in the world, and his brothers and sisters have theirs, and his parents rejoice in his vocation, but cannot enter into its cares or its hopes or its interests. It was not, as we say, thus, with our Lord and His Mother. She could never be without her work by the side of His, in companionship with Him. She had been trained during all these years for a great post in His Kingdom, she had a personal office and duty to discharge towards Himself, she had functions towards those who were to belong to Him, which became only more active and onerous and energetic and perpetual as His own work among souls engrossed Him more and more. In order to understand this, we have only to remind ourselves of what we have already considered as to the advance of our Blessed Lady in grace and in intelligence of the ways of God and of the character and plans of our Lord.

In the first place, all that we know up to this time about our Blessed Lady shows us that her life had become more and more, as time went on, a life

of prayer and the closest communion with God. Her immense increase in sanctity and in knowledge implied the expansion of her intelligence and of her charity to an extent beyond what we can conceive even in the highest Cherubim. Moreover, this great and daily increase had been the fruit, not only of Divine illuminations vouchsafed to her from time to time out of the wonderful bounty of God Who loved her above all His works, but of her own most faithful and energetic cooperation, and especially of that habit of mind of hers which is commemorated in the Gospel, of pondering and praying over all that happened, with regard to our Lord and herself, in the gradual unfolding of the Divine plan for the dispensation of the Incarnation. Her mind was cast in that mould, so to speak, of the most careful, diligent, faithful contemplation and consideration, and this is described for us as her great occupation, during these many years which had now drawn to their close. And perhaps it may not be without some special significance that she is said by the Evangelist to have thought over these things in her heart rather than in her mind, that we may understand that her contemplation and consideration did not terminate in intellectual processes only, beautiful as those must have been in such a mind and on such subjects, but that in her meditation, as the Psalmist says, the fire of love was kindled into a great flame, a flame of prayer and praise and outpourings of charity to God and to man, so that her life had been, from the very beginning of her participation in the mystery of the Incarnation, a life of contemplation, praise, and intercession, following as closely as

possible the interior activity of the Soul and Heart of Jesus Christ Himself.

We have even reason to believe, further, that the intelligence of our Lady had been enriched to a most marvellous extent by her constant familiar intercourse with our Lord, especially during the Hidden Life. The very familiarity of the few words which are recorded as having passed between them shows how entirely He was in the habit of communicating His designs and intentions to her. Christian reason never employed itself more legitimately, more in harmony with what we know of the character and the ways of God and our Lord with those whom He trusts and loves, than when it came to the conclusion that our Lord communicated most fully to His Mother the outlines and principles and even the details of the system of His Church, the darling project of His Sacred Heart, and large portions at least of the history of what was to ensue. It would have been unlike Him, as far as we can see, if He had not done this. There may be a question as to the manner in which this revelation was made. For there are some contemplatives who consider that some preternatural method for her enlightenment as to these matters was used in the case of our Lady, as it has been used from time to time in the history of the Church in the dealings of God with His saints. Others are content to think that the revelation may have been made to her, as it was probably made to the Apostles after the Resurrection, from our Lord's own lips and in His own gracious and tender words. It is enough for us to know that Mary must have entered on the period of the Public

Life with this immense treasure in her heart, the subject of her rapturous contemplations and most fervent prayers.

We have already seen that there may have been more than one reason why our Blessed Lady may have been thus enlightened, but it may be well here to remind ourselves of these reasons, or at least of some of them. The great plan of God, the most wonderful and beautiful of His works in Creation, the work in which His most glorious attributes were to shine forth more conspicuously than elsewhere, certainly required an acknowledgment and a homage and a praise from His intelligent creatures, as far as possible, worthy of itself. This homage and praise and gratitude were secured to it by its communication to the most faithful and intelligent heart of the Blessed Mother. She could penetrate it and understand it as no one else, she could give it its meed of adoring thanksgiving as no one else. Again, it was in the order of the dispensation of the Incarnation that our Lord should have by His side a heart capable of understanding Who He was, what was the dignity of His Person, what the endowments of His Humanity, what He was doing, what He was to do, of sympathizing with Him, entering into His wishes and desires, echoing the infinite charities and mercies and bounties which He was continually pouring forth. There was to be in this sense a second Eve by the side of the second Adam, of whom it might be said that she was a helpmate like Himself, and this all the more, as among the clearest provisions of the Sacred Heart was that which foreshowed to Him the ingratitude and neglect

and coldness of those for whom all these miracles of love, all these inventions of wisdom, were to be brought about.

It was due also to the Blessed Mother herself that she should have this knowledge with regard to the work which had been begun with her consent and cooperation, and that the immense perfection of holiness and intelligence to which she was to rise should be built up by these considerations of the noblest works of God on which mind and heart could be occupied. Especially was it due to her that her mind and heart should be most largely stored with intelligence as to our Lord's office, character, virtues, designs, tastes. She was to be especially for Him, and He for her. And it was well for us also, as she was to be to us all that she was to be, that she should possess this perfect intelligence of the blessings which were to be applied to us, in so large a measure, by her powerful and watchful intercession for us.

It is very clear that the Public Life, on which we are now entering, was a time of our Lord's sojourn upon earth, in which the many great features of His character and office were manifested with a brilliancy and rapidity which were not found in other stages. For then He came forth like a giant to run His course, as the Psalmist sings, to deal with men in every state of spiritual misery or well-being, to work on every side of Him, with an activity which He Himself compared to the unwearying and incessant work of His Father in the Universe.¹ It is by the working of God in the Universe and in Providence

¹ St. John v. 17.

that we come to know many of the features of His Divine Character, and if our Lord had never worked as He did among men a great number of His characteristics would have remained unrevealed. Volume on volume has been written by theologians and spiritual writers on the revelations of Himself made by our Lord in the narratives of the four Evangelists. But the Evangelists have preserved for us only a few crumbs, so to say, of a great banquet, which was being spread day after day for the crowds who flocked to hear Him, or for the friends who were nearest to Him. But the crowds shifted and changed, one set of hearers or petitioners succeeded to another, none lingered long or saw and heard Him for a length of years. Those to whom it was given to be more constantly His companions did not, for the greater portion even of the Public Life, fully realize Who He was, and thus they lacked the fundamental knowledge which was required for understanding Him. No one but Mary could be alive to the fulness and beauty of the revelations He was continually making, and give Him the honour and the gratitude due to Him in each of the various relations to us in which He displayed His wisdom, His mercy, His love. If this was her office in the kingdom of the Incarnation, there was no time at which its exercise was more requisite than this.

It would thus seem to be out of harmony with what we know of the dealings of God with her, and of His designs regarding her, to suppose that when the moment came for our Lord to leave her side for the commencement of His Public Life His Blessed Mother should have had to lay aside her habits,

whether of devout contemplation of His acts and words, leading to adoration and thanksgiving, or of prayer and intercession and active cooperation, in the way in which she could cooperate, in the new phase of His great work in which, if she had only been the greatest and dearest of His saints, she must have been most deeply interested. But we have seen enough to make us think that her position in the Kingdom which He was to found was something more even than this, that is, that she was to have a part in the carrying out of the designs of God, as she had had an active share in bringing about the Incarnation on which they were all founded. We notice this office of our Blessed Lady in the mystery of the Visitation. We shall notice it again in the first great display of miraculous power in the mystery of the wedding feast at Cana, which was not only the first of His great signs, but the beginning of His instruction and formation of His Apostles, and we shall find her finally taking her place by the side of the Cross, and addressed there by our Lord in words that contain a clear reference to this association of hers in the great mystery which was then being accomplished.

These things taken together make us expect to find that she has a part of her own in the Public Life of her Son, as well as in the years which preceded it, and in the years which followed on it. When St. John and St. James left their mother Salome, and when the other leading disciples left their own homes and families to follow our Lord, it is needless to suppose that those whom they left behind them occupied themselves directly in any exclusive

manner with the work to which their children or kinsmen had thus devoted themselves. The homes they had abandoned went on as usual without them, and it is not necessary to suppose that the thoughts of their inmates were entirely engrossed with the proceedings of those who had left them for the new work of the Gospel. But we cannot think this of our Blessed Lady. She lived only for the interests and work of her Son, and she had been divinely enriched by ever fresh accumulations of grace and knowledge, in order that she might be the better enabled to bear her share in the great enterprise which occupied Him. And besides, we gather that when He left Nazareth for Capharnaum, she and His "brethren" went with Him. No intimation of this sort can be without a meaning in the Gospels. We understand this to mean, that for some Divine purpose, her home was to be within reach of Him.

After the feeding of her mind and heart on the new wonders which were continually presented to them, the part which we may be sure was borne by our Lady in the work of the Gospel preaching is the part to which she had already to a great extent devoted herself during the Hidden Life of her Son. We do not need any direct statement of the Evangelists to tell us that she was engaged now in that occupation which had always been her delight, and in which she is employed when for the last time her name is mentioned by any of the New Testament writers after the Ascension. That is, her occupation was prayer. It was the will of God that prayer should hold an immense office in the Kingdom of our Lord throughout all time, that it should be one of

the normal and regular forces in the Kingdom, as much so as the sunshine or the rain in the growth of the corn, or in the unfolding of the flowers of the field. If the working of these natural and normal forces in any part of the universe of God is not continually mentioned in history, it is because it is taken for granted, and men do not need to be continually reminded of what is elementary and continual. When this working ceases for a time for some special cause, the cessation is mentioned and its disastrous effects chronicled. It can only be because we underrate the power and importance of the mighty forces of prayer in the Church that we can ever think of them as inoperative and inactive, or that we require to be perpetually reminded that they are not so.

It may, therefore, be safely and naturally concluded, concerning the occupations of the Blessed Mother of God during the Public Life, that they may be summed up generally in the statement that she was ever devoutly watching our Lord's work and actions, ever contemplating Him under the new relations in which He showed Himself, and ever pouring out her heart in prayer and intercession. As she had learnt to make the successive mysteries of the Holy Infancy, and the classes of men whom those mysteries brought successively before her, the subjects of prayer and intercession, as she had during the Hidden Life learnt to pray most fervently for the accomplishment of the designs and plans of God in the foundation and formation of the Church, so when our Lord went forth from her side for the work of His Ministry, she turned her heart and

mind with all their power and their illumination to the work of helping on, by this most necessary means, the progress of this great work. From time to time she appears, even in the scanty record of these years, and at other times we are not certain that she is absent, as for instance when the holy women are mentioned as ministering to the sustenance of our Lord and the Apostles. There may also have been, as has been said, occasions when our Lord returned to her for awhile, and when the occupations of the Hidden Life may have been to some extent resumed in His communing with her.

It is not easy to suppose that she was kept in ignorance of any of the designs which He formed, or the counsels which He adopted under the shifting circumstances of His career. Such communications would be natural between our Lord and His Mother, and they would add immense light and energy to her prayers. But as for the ordinary occupation of this period as far as our Lady is concerned, we are safe in saying of her that prayer was her great employment, and that in her was begun that great work, which is always going on in the Church, and which forms the whole of the life and the whole of the work of many of her most serviceable children, the work of perpetual intercession, which is often more powerful with God than the labours of apostles themselves, the prudence of the governors of the Church, or the studies of her doctors. It is prayer that brings strength to those who have to fight and toil, wisdom and light to those who have to rule, patience to those who have to suffer, courage and endurance to

those who have to bleed. It is the life of the whole militant Church, turning away from it the anger of God, which is often kindled by its shortcomings, and shielding it from a thousand snares and assaults on the part of its spiritual enemies. No one who has to work for God can afford to neglect it for himself. But it finds in hundreds of souls, who are not called to active labours in the work of the ministry, its own most efficient and active labourers, who may console themselves with the thought that they are the followers in this holy toil of the Blessed Mother of God herself.

It is very natural that those contemplatives who have loved especially to feed their souls on the contemplation of Mary as occupied unintermittently in this holy exercise, should have asked themselves whether there was not some singular and preternatural provision in the tender dispositions of God by which, when absent from our Lord, she may have been aware of what was passing in His Heart, or happening to Him externally. The same kind of question occurs at an earlier time also, for it may be asked, when our Lord was in the womb of His Mother, whether she could not have had revealed to her His thoughts and affections, in order that she might copy them and echo them, and in the same way whether, before He began to speak to her after the Nativity, she might not have been enabled to penetrate His thoughts and hold interior converse with Him. It need hardly be again repeated that a soul and heart which had been so long devoted to the thought of Him alone, which had studied Him and all His ways for so long a period of years,

which had learnt so perfectly the whole character and prospects of the work on which He was now to engage Himself, must even without more have been wonderfully apt in divining His thoughts and sharing all His intentions and interests. We shall see this in the marriage-feast of Cana, where our Lady displays so marvellous a power of understanding His design and interpreting His words.

Not all can understand the footing, if we may use the word, on which our Lady was with her Son, and without this intelligence, there will always be different ways of answering questions of this kind. Some holy writers tell us that our Lady habitually read the thoughts and affections of the Sacred Heart, though perhaps there may have been occasions in which it was more for the glory of God that she should be for a time ignorant in some particular matter, such as that of the reason for His remaining behind in Jerusalem at the age of twelve. It is certain that some amount of intimate knowledge must have been necessary for the perfect discharge of the great duty of prayer, praise, and intercession which was especially committed to her at this time. And we find in the histories of His dealings with the saints and chosen souls, who have had to continue our Lady's work in this respect, that He has been constantly very large in the measure in which He has imparted to such souls the knowledge which they could not possess, except by revelation, of what should be the subject of their prayers. These considerations may at least show us that there is nothing unreasonable in the supposition that our Blessed Lady was allowed in this way also a mar-

vellous degree of companionship with the Sacred Heart of her Son. Many devout hearts will go beyond this. They will say to themselves that what our Lord has done with others in the way of these most tender communications of Himself, is an intimation to us of what He would certainly do, far more perfectly and continuously, with His Mother, whose heart was so much more able to understand Him and so much fuller of love for Him than the hearts of all the world beside.

CHAPTER II.

MARY AFTER OUR LORD'S DEPARTURE.

As we are told nothing about the actual beginning of the Public Life of our Lord, whether He left the home at Nazareth abruptly, or after warning and preparation of some kind, we are sometimes inclined to think that our Lady was suddenly left alone, as she had been when our Lord tarried in Jerusalem. It is probable, however, that if there had been any such abruptness on this occasion, there would have been some notice of it, if not in the Gospels, at least in Christian tradition. For such an incident would have furnished devout souls with another subject for their contemplations of the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin. It seems most reasonable to think that our Lord's departure from Nazareth was not abrupt. There is great probability in the contemplation that, for some time before the actual commencement of the Public Life, He had not only prepared His Mother for it, but that He had also done many things which might have prepared the minds of others in His immediate neighbourhood for the beginning of His preaching. It is very likely that He gradually went more into public as the time drew nigh, and that He might have held many conversations, such as that which He is supposed by

some to have held in the Temple on the last-named occasion, when He engaged the Scribes in discussion about the coming of the Messias, or about the signs of His Person. This is all the more probable when we consider that our Lord did not go forth from Nazareth to join St. John Baptist on the Jordan till the ministry of His Precursor had attained great notoriety and influence. We can hardly think that less than four or five months would have sufficed to give the preaching of St. John this great fame, which drew to him on the banks of the Jordan so large a portion of the population. But our Lord and our Lady must have been aware of this preaching from the very first, even if St. John did not, as we are told by some, give them some formal intelligence before he began to preach, begging our Lord's blessing and our Lady's prayers.

In any case, the beginning of the preaching of St. John must have set before our Blessed Lady a new and most important subject for her constant intercessions. A great movement was now to begin, great streams of grace were to be shed down from Heaven, a great saint was commissioned to preach the Word of God for a special purpose, no less a purpose than that of introducing to the chosen people the long-promised Kingdom of Heaven. The messenger had long been prepared for his task, and no doubt during his preparation he had been the object of much tender solicitude and earnest prayer on the part of the Blessed Mother. Now he would need strengthening, enlightening, encouraging, the powerful guidance and support of the Holy Ghost for his great work, and for his continual persever-

ance and advance in the interior perfection which was his best qualification for his mission, his humility, his disinterestedness, his fervent zeal, his boldness, his tender consideration for souls.

The people who were to come to him would also need fervent prayer that they might be enabled to correspond interiorly to the great external grace of his preaching, and by means of a true conversion be made fit for the reception of our Lord. It was the first great Christian missionary enterprise, and our Lady now began that mighty work of intercession for its success which is the continual occupation of a number of chosen souls in the Church whose names are unknown to men, but whose prayers bring down on the unconscious missionary the grace which makes his words powerful, and on the listening throngs the ineffable blessing of a faithful reception of the Word of God. It is often the characteristic of such souls, that these desires and petitions increase in compass and in intensity, and the prayer that begins for a single holy work of this kind extends itself till it enfolds the whole missionary enterprise of the Church in all time, whether among her own children or those outside her frontiers. Such we may suppose to have been the prayer of Mary on this occasion. And the mission of St. John in itself would present to her thoughtful mind many considerations as to the wisdom and gentle methods of God, Who did not send His Son at once without preparing the people for Him, and Who so largely uses ministrations which do not directly belong to the system of the Church, as auxiliary and subordinate to her own workings upon souls.

After a certain number of months had passed from the beginning of St. John's mission, the time arrived for our Lord Himself to begin His work in a different way. He was to go to the Jordan where St. John was baptizing.¹ There He was to receive in the utmost humility the Baptism of the Precursor, sanctioning and sanctifying it thereby, and in the mystery of His own Baptism the great manifestation of the Ever Blessed Trinity was to take place, in which the Holy Ghost was to descend on Him in the form of a dove, and the voice of the Father was to be heard from Heaven, declaring Him to be His Beloved and only-Begotten Son. We do not dwell here on the theological meaning of this mystery, of its connection with the Christian sacrament of Baptism which is founded upon it, and which, as so founded, confers on us the grace of the adoption of sons. But we can see in this part of the story the great occasions which were furnished to our Blessed Lady of the most heroic and beautiful virtue. In the first place, she now gave up, formally and solemnly and willingly, her own most dear Son, the companion of her life, the only support of her bereavement, for the work which was now the "business of His Father." That our Lady knew Who He was so perfectly, and why He had been given her as her Son, did not in any way blunt the tenderness of her most intense love for His Person, or make the wound of separation less sensible to her heart. Her great and even joyful sacrifice must have been of boundless merit in the sight of God, and have brought down on her a fresh increase of

¹ *Story of the Gospels*, § 17.

her mighty graces. And in her office of intercessor for the children of the Church, she may well be thought to have prayed for the blessing of absolute resignation and joyful cooperation in all such decrees of Providence, by which parents surrender their dearest children for the service of the great Father and Master of all, acknowledging therein His supreme dominion, His infinite consideration for His creatures, and the immense rewards in this life and in the next which He has prepared for those who thus give up to Him what belongs to Him indeed, but what He has lent to them.

Moreover, our Lady must have learnt from our Lord in His conversations with her, the importance and necessity of a conversion of heart and contrition for sin, as the foundations of all spiritual life, and also from what He had told her concerning the Christian sacraments, the value and efficacy of that one of them which is particularly connected with the sacred mystery which had now been consummated on the banks of the Jordan. Although it is not quite certain at what time Christian Baptism was actually and formally instituted, it is certain that it is founded on the Baptism of our Lord, Who then, as the Fathers say, consecrated the element of water for its use in His own sacrament, and that the manifestation of the Ever Blessed Trinity on that occasion, as well as the special declaration that our Lord in His Human Nature was the Beloved Son of God, had reference to the blessings which are conferred on the baptized. Thus the Baptism of our Lord would bring before the mind of His Mother the Divine boon which was to be offered to

the whole race of mankind, superseding the holy rite of circumcision, which did not of itself confer grace, and the rite, whatever it was, by which the female sex was admitted to privileges like those of circumcision, and conferring the grace of cleansing from all sin, original and actual, as well as all the other positive spiritual gifts with which the soul is then endowed, making it a child of God by adoption, and sealing it with a Divine and indelible character. All these things would be subjects of most devout praise and thanksgiving to the Blessed Mother, who was, as is generally believed, herself to receive this great sacrament from our Lord at the time of their next meeting. But she would expand her heart and stretch her thanksgiving, so as to include all that God intended to be conveyed when He determined to institute this great sacrament of regeneration and adoption, all its effects on souls in time and in eternity. She would thank Him not only for those whom it was actually to reach, but for all those also for whom the gift was intended, though by human misery and negligence they may have been deprived of its inestimable blessings.

Immediately on the mystery of the Baptism followed that of the Fasting and Temptation of our Lord in the desert.² It does not seem reasonable to suppose that our Blessed Lady was not made aware of all that was passing amid those lonely rocks of Quarantana, either by warning beforehand from our Lord, or by some interior communication at the time. This mystery was altogether hidden from the world, and it might have been thought that the

² *Story of the Gospels*, § 18

Christ had suddenly vanished from the public sight as soon as He had been proclaimed so solemnly. In truth, the work wrought and the victory won by our Lord in those forty days were of incalculable greatness and importance, more than if He had gone half over the world, and converted a score of nations. For the work and the victory of the Fasting and Temptation could have been performed and achieved by no one but Himself, and their effects last on through all time, and are powerful in thousands of souls every day and every hour. It was then that exterior mortifications were consecrated by His touch, and endowed with the wonderful powers, especially for the subjugation of the lower man, the expiation of former faults, the impetration of graces and virtues and strength against the enemy of souls, which they have ever since possessed, and which are constantly in play in Christian conflicts everywhere. It was then, especially, that the power of Satan for the seduction and perversion and destruction of souls was enormously weakened, and the triumphs over him of the weakest children of the Church amply secured. This was the subject, then, of the contemplations and intercessions of Mary at this time, of her thanksgivings to God for the ineffable magnitude of the gift to us in this mystery, as in the previous boon of the Baptism, and of most ardent prayer for our faithfulness in the use and exercise of these mighty boons. Our Lord had shown Himself, moreover, under new circumstances in this mystery, for He had condescended to allow Himself to be tempted, and He left behind Him,

in the record of His dealings with the enemy of souls, the most perfect pattern and instruction for all His children under similar trials. Here was something new for the thanksgivings of His Blessed Mother.

We are told by some contemplatives that our Lady now began to exercise her office of Mother and refuge of the afflicted, especially of the afflicted by the temptations and molestations of the Evil One. She had herself great experience of the assaults of the devils, although it is true that the attacks which they were allowed to make on her, which seem to have been very violent and furious, were not like those from which we suffer, inasmuch as her soul, having always been entirely free from original sin, had in it none of the inherent weakness and disorder which enables the evil spirits to stir us up against ourselves, and bring on that interior conflict of which St. Paul draws the picture in the Epistle to the Romans. And the great conflict which her Divine Son now undertook, and His victory over Satan, would make it natural for our Lady to pray most earnestly that the strength which He then won for us might be faithfully used in our own struggles against the same malignant foe, who was indefinitely weakened and humiliated by the calm dignity and ease with which our Lord baffled all his wiles and put him to flight.

We are also told that this was one of the occasions on which our Lady kept company with our Lord in the actions He was performing, besides discharging her office as intercessor and giver of thanks. For she shut herself up during these forty

days, to spend them in her own way in mortification and prayer, inasmuch as these great weapons of Christian warfare were now specially consecrated by our Lord. Thus she handed on His example to the Church, which was to bear these practices in eternal honour, not only for the conquest of the disorders which are bred in our souls by their innate weakness and by the too ready indulgence which they have yielded to the lower parts of our nature, indulgence which renders mortification absolutely necessary both for virtue and for interior peace, but also a most powerful instrument of expiation for past faults, of progress in virtue, of multiplication of good works, and as the condition of a life of prayer, intercession, impetration, and above all, of imitation of our Blessed Lord. All these truths our Lady perfectly understood, and the penance now done by our Lord afforded her the natural occasion for imitation of Him therein.

During the time of the forty days spent by our Lord in the desert, it seems that His Blessed Precursor was visited by the deputation from the ecclesiastical authorities in Jerusalem of which his namesake the Evangelist tells us.³ This marks an important point in the history of the movement, as we should say, which had been set on foot by the Baptist. For it was now that it became finally plain and certain that his mission would not be accepted by the Chief Priests and Scribes. They sat in the seat of Moses, and held immense influence over the minds of the people. They were afraid to oppose St. John openly, for they feared the great power which he

3 St. John i. 19, 28; *Story of the Gospels*, § 19.

wielded among the multitudes. But his preaching was distasteful to them, both because it was a shock to their pride that any one should teach with so much authority and success without their sanction, and also because their lives were too corrupt, from ambition, avarice, and sensuality, to relish so plain a call to repentance and amendment of life. St. John had already had some of the Pharisees among his hearers, and had spoken to them with characteristic boldness, putting his finger on the very danger of spiritual pride which we find in them at a much later time, during the preaching of our Lord.⁴

The formal mission to St. John was a half measure, and they might have acted more openly against him if they had dared. The blessed Baptist spoke of himself with the utmost humility, and took the opportunity to utter his solemn witness to our Lord, Whom he had lately baptized, and Whom he declared to be the true baptizer in the Holy Ghost. There were many things which would suggest the intercessions of our Lady, whether for the perfect faithfulness of the witness whom God had chosen, or for the poor deluded souls of these Chief Priests and Scribes, who were now entering decidedly on the path of resistance to God's Providential designs which was to lead them within so short a time to the most determined opposition to our Lord Himself. The greatest evils in the Church may be the work of some among her chief ministers, who have in their hands, in consequence of their position, so much power, either for the furtherance or the hindrance of the good works which God desires to see carried out. The purity of

⁴ Compare St. Matthew iii. 7, with St. John viii. 33—39.

intention, the personal disinterestedness, and reluctance to accept for himself the slightest honour, which were displayed by St. John, must have furnished our Lady with subjects of ardent thanksgiving, contrasting so beautifully as they did with the self-seeking of the Chief Priests.

After this witness of St. John, we find him pointing out our Lord to a few of his own chosen disciples.⁵ Our Lord returned from the desert after the Temptation to the scene of St. John's baptizing, and then it was that the beautiful and significant name of the Lamb of God was first applied to Him by His Precursor. It was then that He spent a few days in gathering around Him the first of His Apostles, St. Andrew and St. Peter, possibly St. James and St. John, with St. Philip and St. Bartholomew or Nathanael. The manner in which each soul was brought to Him, and in which He dealt with each, was different, and we have thus a first glimpse of the peculiar tenderness, gentleness, and discrimination with which He ordinarily dealt and deals with souls. This careful and delicate method was to pass on from Him to all who were to have in the Church the function of attracting, converting, and forming souls one by one, whether as directors or superiors, and we can hardly be wrong in thinking that our Blessed Lady was enabled to follow it and delight herself in it, while her appreciation of it would lead her to pray most fervently for those who were to exercise this branch of the pastoral or quasi-pastoral office in the Church, as well as those who were to be the objects of their labours. Here is a

⁵ *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 20, 21.

whole world of wonderful beauties of grace, into which we can never enter fully until the time of the manifestation of all things. It came into being under the hands of our Lord Himself, and the Apostles, as we can see in their Epistles, followed Him in their careful administration of the power and influence committed to them. It must last on in the Church till the end of time, as the subject of much earnest intercession for all those who fill the office which our Lady was now discharging, by her prayers for the success of this work in souls.

Thus, within a few days of His great but unseen triumphs over Satan, our Lord was surrounded by a little group of the souls which, as He afterwards said, were given Him by His Father. He could know their future labours and crowns, and rejoice in all the work which His grace was to produce in them. He could tell Simon that he was to be called Peter, He could declare Nathanael to be an Israelite without guile, and to promise to him and his companions that they should see the heavens opened and the Angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Everything, in these first days of the Public Life, is full of hope, promise, brightness, joy, although there could not have been wanting, to our Lord's Heart, and to some extent to that of our Lady, presages of the days of trial and ill-success which were to be the issue of the coldness and hostility of the very class who had it in their power to help on the work of the Gospel the most efficaciously. We need not think it necessary to suppose that our Lady had, except partially and occasionally, that prevision of the details of the future which was possessed by our Lord

—her office was that of continual prayer, suggested by the incidents as they arose of which she had so full an intelligence. But now the time of separation, which had lasted for seven or eight weeks, was at an end, and she was to meet her Blessed Son, with His little handful of disciples, at the marriage feast at Cana, which was to witness an immense advance in the manifestation of His power.

CHAPTER III.

MARY AT THE BEGINNING OF SIGNS.

THE marriage feast of Cana, at which we are now arrived, shows us our Blessed Lady in a more prominent position than the former incidents of the Public Life.¹ In those she is withdrawn from the sight, and is cooperating with our Lord, most efficaciously indeed, but only by the way of prayer and interior activity. This kind of action of hers is that which is to be the general rule during the Public Life. But there are to be exceptions to this general rule, occasions on which she comes forward openly to a certain extent, as if she had a special office to discharge to our Lord, apart from the general and most intimate interior companionship with Him which we suppose her to have enjoyed, and apart also from that perpetual exercise of the most powerful intercession, which is a work which she never ceases to perform for the benefit of the Church. In this incident of the marriage feast she is almost as prominent as in that of the Visitation, which was the first of our Lord's great spiritual miracles after His Incarnation, as this marriage feast is the occasion of His first great material miracle. In each of these our Blessed Lady has a part of her own to take.

Although the time of their separation had not yet

¹ *Story of the Gospels*, § 22.

been long, still very much had happened since they parted on which our Blessed Lady would long to converse with her Divine Son. The interval had been marked by splendid mysteries, the Baptism and the Vision of the Blessed Trinity, the Fasting and Temptation, and the first vocation of some of the future Apostles. The occasion of the meeting itself was full of holy interest to her, and the bridegroom and the bride were probably her relatives. The Hidden Life, which had consecrated the Christian family and all its beautiful charities, had not had room for the blessing of any marriage, and this was to be supplied on the occasion before us. If there were nothing more than this in the mystery of which we are speaking, it would still be highly precious to us, as being the one occasion in our Lord's life in which the blessing of His presence and the consecration which it involved were secured for the holy nuptial tie which was to be so largely enriched by Him with sacramental grace in the Church. To all holy and religious souls such occasions are times of much fervent prayer, for they imply an immense need of grace for the right and holy discharge of the duties which are then assumed. So in the large and motherly heart of our Blessed Lady the meeting would be one of great joy on this account also. But it was also to be used by our Lord for a great step in the advance of His Kingdom, and for this advance Providence had arranged to make use of our Blessed Lady as an instrument.

We need not relate over again what has been sufficiently commented on elsewhere, but it is right to bring out in this place the parts of the history

which relate to our Lady more particularly. In the first place it seems natural to assume that it was not merely out of compassion for the slight trouble which might fall on the newly-wedded pair or the furnishers of the entertainment, if it were to come about that the deficiency of the wine were noticed, that she spoke as she did speak to our Lord. No doubt the hearts of both of them were full of the tenderest compassion and the most delicate consideration, so that under ordinary circumstances it might have been natural for them to exert themselves for the relief of such persons from any embarrassment or appearance of want of provision for their guests. But it must be remembered that our Lord had not, as far as we know, as yet begun His course of miraculous works, and it might seem hardly fitting that He should for the first time work a miracle on such an apparently trivial occasion. We must suppose our Blessed Lady to have known or divined, not only His possession of the power which would be required for the miraculous supply of the need, but also that it would be in accordance with His plans for the advancement of His work in the world, to manifest His power in this particular manner. Thus the interposition of our Blessed Lady is an evidence of her insight into His designs for the confirmation of His claims by means of the evidence of miracles. She must have been thinking of this rather than of the particular needs of the wedded pair, and she must have understood that thoughts of the same kind were occupying His own mind. She must have seen in the occasion before her, not only the blessing of the holy nuptial tie by the presence of the Incarnate

Son of God, but also a stage in the gradual unfolding of the evidences for His mission into the world. But to say this is almost to say in other words that she had an intimate and intuitive knowledge of His intentions and wishes. She divined not only that the time was at hand for the first manifestation of His power, but also that it was in accordance with His will that she should exercise the office of bringing about that manifestation.

At the same time, as has already been said, we may see in this interference of hers, unsolicited and unthought of by those whom it was meant directly to benefit, the extreme tenderness and compassionateness of her motherly heart. It is as if she could not bear to see those two poor souls beginning their wedded life with a kind of failure, as if she saw in their confusion and disappointment a sufficient motive for setting in motion the whole Divine power which was shrined in the Sacred Humanity of her Son. It is the same kind of compassion, as has been said, which we find in our Lord Himself on the occasion of the hunger of the multitude who had followed Him into the desert. Then also He had a Divine purpose of His own, apart from their relief. There can have been nothing unseemly in what was proposed by our Blessed Lady and acquiesced in by our Blessed Lord. And we may encourage ourselves very much by this thought in our prayers to Him and to her, remembering how she thought for these people before they thought for themselves, and was willing to make their comparatively slight necessities the subject of her intercession with the most merciful Heart of her Son.

In the next place, the supposition that our Lady was now acting with the purpose of promoting the glory of God, and especially the manifestation of the power of her Divine Son, rather than out of simple compassion, must modify very much our view of the whole incident. Our Lord's answer to her simple remark, "They have no wine," seems to show that He understood her interference in the sense which is here proposed. For His answer consists of two parts. First He seems to acknowledge her influence, and in a certain sense to speak as if it put some pressure on Him, while in the second part of the answer He tells her that His time has not yet come. If this means His time for working miracles generally, then it would appear that the faith of Mary, as manifested in her injunction to the servants, "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do it," caused Him to anticipate the time of which He spoke, by beginning His series of miracles now rather than somewhat later. In other cases, and long after He was publicly and generally known as a worker of miracles, He had carefully to elicit and strengthen the faith of those who sought some wonder at His hand, but in this case He speaks as if her faith was so strong that He could resist it no longer.

. If, on the other hand, the words before us mean that the moment for this particular miracle had not quite arrived, they show again, when taken in connection with the injunction He gave almost immediately, that the prayer of His Mother had the same effect of hastening on the moment. It is strange that any difficulty can be made as to this, as it is only what happens whenever a grace is gained by prayer, and

our Lord, Who foresees and knows all things, arranges the prayer which wins the grace, as well as the granting of the grace to the prayer. In any case, the great miracle was almost immediately wrought, and it is impossible to question the large part of our Lady in bringing it about. It was brought about exactly in the way which was most in harmony with the office of intercessor which we attribute to her at this time, and throughout our Lord's Life, and afterwards. That is, she had no part at all in working the miracle, which was the effect of our Lord's Divine power alone. But she had the whole work and glory of inducing our Blessed Lord to exert His Power in this way and at this time, and this in the case of a miracle, in a certain sense, of unique power, in the change of one substance into another, a miracle which stands at the very beginning of the whole glorious chain, and had the result of manifesting Him to the faith of His disciples in an entirely new manner.

There can be no doubt that every circumstance of this miracle was arranged in a beautiful order by the Providence of God. It was arranged that our Lord should begin His chain of miracles just at this time, when His first disciples had joined Him. It was arranged that the miracle itself should have a prophetic importance, inasmuch as it pre-figured the permanent marvel of transubstantiation in the Blessed Sacrament, the marriage feast of our Lord and the Church. It was arranged that the words of the steward of the feast to the bridegroom should be just what they were, so as to admit of their application to the whole system of our Lord, Who keeps His best for

last. This is all undeniable. But it must be equally undeniable that the position of our Blessed Lady in the miracle must have been a part of this Divine arrangement, that she should be the moving cause of the performance of the wonder at that time and in that way. Our Lord chose to sanctify St. John in the womb of St. Elisabeth by means of the voice of His own Blessed Mother, and He chose to work this opening and most splendid miracle by means of the intercession of His Mother. She had a part in that first sanctification of a soul by the grace of the Redeemer, and she had a part in this first manifestation of His glory and power, in the working of an unheard-of miracle.

St. John tells us that He "manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him," that is, the miracle was perfect in all its parts and in all its effects. Our Lord showed thereby, not simply that He could change water into wine, but that God was with Him and in Him, and that because this was so, what He said was the Word of God, what He taught was the truth of God, what He enjoined was the law of God. But the disciples must have seen also in the miracle a manifestation of the power of Mary as well as of the glory of her Son. They must have seen more than her power, for they must have seen how perfectly she knew Who her Son was, how perfectly she read His Heart and divined His intentions. They must have understood that He could have worked the miracle without her, but that He did not so choose to work it. They must have understood that He knew of the failing of the wine, and yet that He waited for her to tell Him of it, that her

words to Him were a part of the ordained series of causes in the accomplishment of the work.

Our Lord's Sacred Heart, so full of thankfulness to the Father, and of holy joy in seeing the revelation which was to be made through Himself opening out in ever fresh and more glorious manifestations, must have overflowed with gratitude and love at this beginning of signs, as His Evangelist calls it. For now, as it were, began to flow the ample volume of the streams of God's bounty in the dispensation of miraculous signs, signs which were at once evidences of His faithfulness and mercy, and representations of greater and more lasting boons of spiritual healing and relief and magnificence. They were at once to fasten on and ripen and strengthen the faith of His disciples in all time, which was to be, as faith always had been, the condition of pleasing God and the key to untold treasures and glories of every kind. They were also to be in themselves expressions of the most tender mercy, shedding itself forth in material gifts and implying spiritual favours of every kind. He was to work a certain number Himself in every kind, and then to leave the gift behind Him in the Church with the promise that those who believed in Him should work even greater wonders than He had worked, because He was to go to the Father. On the evidence of the miracles of the Apostles and on that of the fulfilment of the prophecies, was to rest the conversion of the world.

In every age of the Church, thousands and thousands of His saints were to be allowed to use the gift, and in each single exercise thereof there was to be the exertion of His own power, an act of love and

compassion of His own Sacred Heart. He must have rejoiced, therefore, with an infinite joy at the opening of these floodgates of mercy, at the blessings which they directly conveyed to the subjects whom their power reached, but much more in their efficacy in rolling away doubts and difficulties in the minds of those to whom they were the first heralds of the Word of God, the harbingers of all the spiritual graces and gifts with which it was charged. He rejoiced with an infinite joy in the faithfulness and humility and purity of intention and courage with which the gift was to be used by the Saints, to whom it was to be given to use it in His Name. And surely no thought of this kind could have been dearer to Him than that, in this opening mystery of the dispensation of miracles, His Blessed Mother had exercised the office so sweetly, so humbly, and yet with so perfect a confidence and trust in Him. He was to derive immense glory from His saints, and a great part of this was to come from the faith in which their wonders were to be wrought, for it gave Him great honour to have servants so powerful in the midst of their human infirmities. But the glory that would redound to Him from His Mother was indefinitely greater and more precious to Him than any that He could receive from the faith of His saints to the end of time.

We do not know that the heart of our Lady was allowed to penetrate the future, so that the whole of the mighty series of our Lord's miracles, whether in His lifetime or in the Church, could have been manifest to her as a subject of gratitude and praise. But the unlocking of the power of miracles, which had

now taken place, was a boon to the world and a glory to God which her heart and mind were able to appreciate as no others could. She could look at the bounties of God and our Lord in their source and fountain, without counting out every single instance in which that fountain might flow forth. Thus, in any case, it must have been an intense joy to her to see this great range of manifestations of Divine condescension opened, and to have known that it had been opened at her suggestion, made in obedience to the guidance of the Holy Ghost. She could rejoice intensely in the faith of the disciples, more, indeed, than in the miracle itself. For in that faith was contained the principle and the security of the whole of that most glorious service to God in which their lives were to be spent. This is the first time at which their faith is named, although there must have been much faith in their souls already when they joined themselves to Him as their Master. Their faith was yet to grow in firmness and clearness and in the teaching of the Father, until it became strong enough to be made the foundation of the Church. But the dawn had come in its full beauty, the sun had risen in their hearts, and they would for ever look back on that blessed feast when our Lady said, "They have no wine," as the moment in their lives when they had first really known our Lord.

CHAPTER IV.

MARY DURING THE FIRST GALILÆAN PREACHING.

MANY devout writers teach us the benefit which we may gain by associating ourselves, as far as may be, to the thoughts and heart of our Blessed Lady in our contemplations of the Sacred Passion. Yet, if it were not for a few words of the fourth Gospel this most precious habit would have no direct sanction in the New Testament. The account of our Lady standing at the foot of the Cross, and of the words spoken by our Lord to His Mother and to St. John on that occasion, was long kept back from the Church, and was among the very latest of the additions made to the canonical Scriptures as time went on in the Apostolic age. We cannot think that, apart from this positive sanction, we should have been fulfilling our Lord's intentions, when He gave us the treasure of the Gospel narratives of His Passion, if we had refrained from following the natural instincts of Christian piety in this respect. Those verses of St. John tell us of the words which actually fell from our Lord's lips on that occasion. But they were not needed to tell us of the Compassion of Mary, nor what a treasure of holy thoughts and affections is enclosed in that Compassion. Nor could the entire silence of the

Evangelists, on all that relates to her sufferings and sympathy with her Son at that time, be enough to justify us in neglecting to pay that tribute of love to our Lord which consists in the contemplation of His Passion in the heart of His Blessed Mother.

If this is true concerning one portion of our Lord's history, it is true of all, unless there were ever a time when the heart of Mary did not beat in the most perfect and most intelligent union with His. To ask the devout Christian to contemplate the Public Life of our Lord in the way in which he has already learnt to contemplate the Passion, can be nothing but an extension to one part of the same Sacred History of a most profitable, dutiful, and natural habit with which he is already familiar. We may surely expect here the same great benefits to our own souls, the same more perfect and tender apprehension of the object of our contemplation, which are found in this treatment of the Passion. It is the object of these chapters to help on such a practice of meditation by suggesting such thoughts which belong to it as may be found by keeping in mind our Lady's constant presence or familiar and daily intercourse with our Lord at this time. Her name is now never or seldom mentioned in the narrative, but her silent, prayerful, loving, and adoring presence may be felt throughout.

The method here proposed is in itself nothing new. If we take such a book, for instance, as Father Arias' great work on the *Imitation of Christ*, with its twofold division of "titles" and "virtues" of our Blessed Lord, or again, a work such as D'Argentan's

Grandeurs de Jésus-Christ, or any one of our familiar books of meditation, or again, if we simply recite the "Litany of the Holy Name," or the "Crown of our Lord," we have to pass in review a succession of meditations or suggestions or invocations which are all drawn from the History of the Gospels. They have been culled by their pious writers, in the case of the books just named, from numberless Christian writers, Fathers of the Church, theologians, commentators on Sacred Scripture, ascetic and spiritual authors, and the lives of the Saints. They are the fruit of intelligent study of our Lord's character and attributes as manifested in His works and words, turned to purposes of devotion and instruction. There must be in the first instance sound and deep theology, as the basis of the fabric, an acquaintance with the whole doctrine of the Incarnation, Office, and Person of our Lord. This is indispensable to enable the materials of the Gospel History to be rightly and profitably used. And there must be, in the second instance, a very deep, intimate, and accurate knowledge of the details and order and arrangement of our Lord's Life. With these essential requirements to start with, the Christian writers have compiled these treasures of holy thoughts for the benefit and delight of countless souls, who will render them eternal thanks in the Heavenly Kingdom.

It must be certain, and it must be again repeated, that our Blessed Lady must have had from the very first moment of the Incarnation, a most deep and perfect acquaintance with what we call the theology of the Incarnation. This knowledge must have gone

on increasing in lucidity and in compass as she advanced through the successive stages of her life with our Lord. Thus, at the time of which we are now speaking, she must have been altogether alone in the greatness of this knowledge, from the simple fact of the immense lavishness with which it was communicated to her, her unexampled opportunities of knowing her Son more and more, her unequalled intelligence, and her incomparable faithfulness in the use of all graces. St. Joseph had opportunities next to hers in their richness, but St. Joseph was no longer by her side. St. John Baptist must also have had wonderful knowledge of our Lord, but he had not lived with Him as Mary had, nor was he so near to Him as she was. Those who were to be the great saints of the Church were as yet, if we may so speak, in a state of comparative spiritual infancy. For we cannot be sure that the Apostles fully realized that our Lord was God until the time of the Confession of St. Peter. Yet, if they did not perfectly understand our Lord's Divinity, that alone must have made them less capable of understanding His works, His words, His methods, His virtues. The difference between them and our Blessed Lady is incidentally shown, in the plainest way, in the miracle of which we have just had to speak. Our Blessed Lady understood before the miracle took place, and she intervened as she did because she knew, all that the Apostles learnt from the miracle when it had been wrought, and much more also.

It seems improbable, to say the least, that a soul so highly enriched with knowledge as to our Lord's Person and designs, should have been left without

knowledge as to the details of His actions, interior and exterior, for the purpose of exercising upon them, to His greater glory, the thoughts of her mind and the affections of her heart. This truth is the foundation of all that the contemplatives have told us as to the various modes of intelligence by which these things were communicated to Mary. Her mind and heart had been feeding on our Lord ever since the Incarnation, and now that He was manifesting Himself more variously and splendidly than ever before, it is natural to think that He did not leave Himself without the continual homage which was due to Him, and which she alone could pay to Him. A soul already so greatly enriched and accustomed to live upon Him, so to say, day after day, would find itself bereaved of its habitual occupation if she had not had Him as before to live upon. Moreover, we have spoken of her occupation at this time as two-fold, that is, contemplation and intercession. But this latter most holy and profitable exercise, one of the great normal powers in the working of the Kingdom of God, is in great part dependent on the former. One of the simplest reasons why we believe His saints to have a communicated knowledge of our prayers and needs, is that we know they are meant to pray for us and to use their great power with God in our favour.

Certainly, when all has been said on this subject, we cannot imagine that any meditations of ours on the mysteries of our Lord's Life as they pass before us, can be taken as representations of those ineffably beautiful thoughts and considerations and affections which those mysteries awakened in the mind and

heart of His Blessed Mother. That would indeed be a book of meditation without rival, which was a comment of Mary on the Life of our Lord. Her soul was a faithful mirror in which, as far as was possible, the Sacred Heart of our Lord was reflected and followed. But as to this, we are as able to enter into the heart of Mary and the Sacred Heart Itself in one part of the history as in another. If we can catch light and love from Mary as our Lord's Companion in the Passion, we can do so also from Mary as our Lord's Companion in His active Life. This seems enough to say here by way of further explanation of the following chapters.

Immediately after the wonderful miracle at Cana we find our Lord going with His Mother, His brethren, and His disciples to Capharnaum, which is now for the first time mentioned in connection with Him.¹ This very short visit was probably made by way of preparation for the future passage to Jerusalem, which was now imminent on account of the approach of the Pasch. We already know that it was our Blessed Lady's custom to go up to Jerusalem on this occasion every year, but we have no record in the Gospels from which we can gather whether she continued this custom to the end. At the last Pasch mentioned in the Gospels, that at which our Lord suffered, we find her there. But perhaps that visit was arranged specially, in order that she might be present at the Passion. As, however, we hear of no reason why she should not have gone up for the previous annual feasts, we may assume that she was present at this, the first which falls within our Lord's Public Ministry.

¹ St. John ii. 12; *Story of the Gospels*, § 22.

The incidents of this Pasch are related to us, as far as we know them, by St. John alone.² That is, we know that on this His first appearance as a Teacher in the Holy City, He cleansed, for the first time, the Temple of His Father, by driving out the buyers and sellers, and overturning the tables of the money-changers. His Father's House was not to be made a place of merchandize. This was a great act of authority, and there was something miraculous about the acquiescence of the people concerned, as well as of the authorities of the Temple. It led to their putting to Him the question as to His authority, which He answered in the mysterious words about destroying the Temple of His Body, which He could rebuild in three days. We also know that He worked a great many miracles at the feast. This is clear from the words of Nicodemus to Him, and also from the fact that, on His return to Galilee, He was welcomed with enthusiasm by the Galilæans, who had seen these miracles. It seems certain, therefore, that our Lord had now taken up a conspicuous position in the eyes of the people, and that it might have seemed likely that He would continue to preach and baptize in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem.³

At the same time there are notes and traces of the prelude to a strong opposition to Him. St. John tells us that many would have come to Him as disciples while He was at Jerusalem, but that our Lord would not trust Himself, or commit Himself to them. The Evangelist points to this as a proof of our Lord's inherent knowledge of men. He had

² *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 23, 24.

³ *Ibid.* § 23.

not to learn them by experience, "for He knew what was in man."⁴ To some, as to Nicodemus, He did commit Himself, and the Evangelist gives us the summary of the dialogue between them, which He may very probably have had from Nicodemus himself.⁵ But in general it seemed likely that the note of opposition which had been struck already by the Chief Priests in the case of St. John, would only be intensified in the case of our Lord. The preaching of the two was identical, but our Lord appeared in the city and Temple itself, instead of living on the outskirts of the country, and, more than that, He supported His claims to be received as from God by the evidence of miracles which had been altogether wanting in St. John. The real grounds for the hostility which was gradually to become more and more intense, lay in the evil lives, the worldliness, the ambitions, the petty personal jealousies, and the statecraft, of the ecclesiastical rulers. It was impossible, as our Lord said to them a year later, for them to believe, who were so fond of worldly honour.

Our Lord appears to have remained some weeks in Judæa, receiving disciples and baptizing them by the hands of the future Apostles. He was thus in a position of apparent rivalry to St. John Baptist, whose ministry was not yet ended. The Jews seem to have done their best to excite jealousies between them, and we are told of the complaints made to their own master by the disciples of St. John, and of his beautiful reply, which contained also a very clear witness to the Divinity of our Lord.⁶ It was now

⁴ St. John ii. 25.

⁵ *Story of the Gospels*, § 24.

⁶ *Ibid.* § 25.

that St. John spoke of our Lord as the Bridegroom, and of Himself as His friend. This state of things was soon brought to an end by the departure of our Lord from Galilee, which is said by the Evangelist to have been immediately occasioned by His hearing that the Chief Priests had become aware of the great success of His preaching. He determined to return to Galilee, and to make that province the chief scene of His Ministry, at least for a time. Soon after His leaving Judæa, as it appears, St. John too disappeared from the neighbourhood, having been seized and imprisoned by Herod in consequence of his opposition to the incestuous and adulterous connection between the King and Herodias.

If our Blessed Lady had attended at Jerusalem for the feast, she may have witnessed the beginning of our Lord's teaching there, including the first cleansing of the Temple. But it is probable that she left with the ordinary Galilæan pilgrims as soon as the feast itself was over. The incidents of which a brief summary has been given would furnish her with a continued succession of matter for prayer, praise, and intercession. She must often have longed to see the Temple cleansed from the profanations brought within its precincts by the buyers and sellers, although their traffic was to some extent occasioned by the necessities of the many pilgrims from the country and from distant parts of the world, and was no doubt sanctioned, and even encouraged, by the Chief Priests for ends of their own. There was something more royal and masterful about our Lord's action now than had been

manifested before. Our Lady's chief interest would lie in the anxious question as to the reception of her Son by the people in general, and the authorities in particular. For none would she pray more earnestly than for the priests. Their influence was paramount among the people, and thus, humanly speaking, they held in their hands the good success or the ill success of our Lord's preaching. Persons in the like position are often exposed to one of the most subtle and dangerous of temptations. Our Lord said once of some of His enemies, that they would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven themselves, and that they hindered others who wished to enter it. The power of great initiative in good is in the hands of men in such positions, and they are very strongly tempted to prevent its being exercised by others than themselves. Thus, with no bad intention, with no positive desire of hindering good, their very position makes them hinder it if they will not do it, and they look with jealousy on any one who is ready to work in the direction in which they ought to work themselves. The attitude of such men must always cause anxiety in those who have to discharge our Blessed Lady's office of intercession.

She was herself probably at Cana, when our Lord returned from Judæa, perhaps about the time of the feast of Pentecost. She must have followed with immense interest His short journey through Samaria, by the route which was the most convenient for single travellers or for small parties, who did not excite the same hostility as larger bodies, especially of pilgrims. It was then that He held His first dealings with the Samaritans, with

one of whose women He conversed at Jacob's well, in a manner which led to His joyful reception on the part of the inhabitants of Sichem. To Him there was no insuperable distinction between Jew and Samaritan and Gentile. He was the Saviour and Teacher of all. It is clear from His words to the Apostles about the fields being white unto harvest, and about the sower and reaper rejoicing together, that He had then in His mind the admission to the Church, by means of those Apostles, not only of the Samaritan rebels, but of the whole Gentile world which lay beyond them. He was only sent personally to the House of Israel, but the salvation He was to work was not to be confined within any limits more restricted than the human race itself. This may have added a special joy to the Sacred Heart at this time. The poor woman whom He had spoken with by the well was the representative of thousands of poor wandering sheep, whose wanderings had been in great measure caused by the ignorance and corruption in which she had been brought up. And the Samaritans themselves, who had listened to Him so gladly, were to His Heart the scanty first-fruits of an immense harvest of souls like themselves.⁷

Here another field was opened to the contemplations and prayers of our Lady, who had parted from Him so lately, and whose Heart kept company with His own as these incidents of His early preaching were communicated to her. Already it could be half seen that there was trouble, opposition, persecution, rejection in store for Him from the Jewish Church,

and that, on the other hand, God was to afford Him a compensation that would satisfy His longings, in giving Him the heathen for a heritage, and the utmost parts of the earth for a possession. Our Lady's prayers could feed themselves on these future prospects, as well as on the progress of His work as far as it had as yet gone. They would hang over Nicodemus, to help him on towards a complete victory over the human respects which were yet for some time to hold him back. They would fall on the disciples of St. John in their jealousy for their master, that they might listen more intelligently to his teaching concerning our Lord, and catch his beautiful spirit of self-abnegation and humility. They would follow the Baptist himself in his distant prison, where his days were to close so early in his career of activity, but with his work fully done, his witness faithfully rendered.

During the few days which our Lord seems to have spent at Cana after His return from Judæa, an incident is placed which had probably a greater significance than appears at first sight, and which our Blessed Lady must have understood. This is the miracle which our Lord worked at the prayer of the nobleman of Capharnaum who came to beg Him to heal his son.⁸ Our Lord's words to this nobleman, "Unless you see signs and wonders, you believe not," appear to have been meant to lead him on from an imperfect to a more perfect faith. He believed that our Lord had the power of miracles, otherwise he would not have made his prayer, and he believed also that He was full of mercy and

⁸ *Story of the Gospels*, § 27.

compassion, otherwise He would not have asked Him to take a journey of so many miles to heal the child. But he had not penetrated the truth that our Lord could heal by word as well as by touch or personal presence, and that it was enough for him to will the cure, at whatever distance, and it would be effected. If we might suppose, for instance, that this man had had the same faith with the centurion his friend afterwards, who would not put our Lord to the trouble of coming even a few steps into his house, but bade Him, "Speak the word only," and the servant would be healed, he would not have acted as he did.

It is not improbable that it may even have been in our Lord's Heart to exercise freely His power of miracles when at a distance, as has been done from time to time by some of the saints. In this case His miracles might have been even more numerous than they were. And perhaps there was in the beginning of our Lord's preaching a great readiness on His part to be very large indeed in the use of such powers, which was afterwards somewhat chilled by the want of faith in the people, and also by their ingratitude. We shall presently find the pride and arrogance of the people of Nazareth, who looked upon Him as a kind of property of their own, not without a secret contempt for one who had lived among them so humbly, preventing Him from exercising His power in their city to any degree at all. On the other hand, we find Him, on the first memorable Sabbath at Capharnaum of which we have record, healing all the sick indiscriminately that were brought to Him with the utmost largeness

of compassion. It is very likely that our Lady understood His motives, and saw the careful reverence with which He used His miraculous powers, most largely when there was no hindrance in the people, more sparingly when there was a lack of faith, or the baneful impediment of pride, and that she praised Him and thanked Him, and prayed for those who might have to do with Him, as petitioners for themselves or for others, or as the recipients of His bounties.

The local traditions of Nazareth throw some light on the circumstances of that Sabbath, the last which our Lord spent in that place at this time, when He began by applying to Himself the famous words of Isaias which described the Messiah and His mission of mercy, and then refused to work signs and miracles for the satisfaction of the pride and curiosity of His fellow-townsmen. St. Luke describes the scene to us with his usual brevity. It seems to be prefixed to the opening of the Public Ministry of our Lord in Galilee, which was to be accompanied by so much applause and popular favour, as a humiliation which He most gladly welcomed at such a time, and it also served incidentally to make Him fix His residence, as far as He had any residence, in Capharnaum, instead of in His own city. Capharnaum, by its central situation, its nearness to the Lake, and to the great roads intersecting Galilee, was a far more convenient place for Him than the more retired town of Nazareth. The fury of the Nazarenes appears to us inexplicable, but they seem to have been a rude and uncouth population, held in general disrepute.⁹ The site is still

⁹ *Story of the Gospels*, § 28.

shown of the chapel, built on the spot whence our Lady witnessed the attempt of the Nazarenes to throw our Lord down from the Mount of Precipitation. Thus her sufferings in this instance are united to His. She must have left Nazareth immediately, and settled with our Lord in Capharnaum. Nazareth could be no place for her after the attempted outrage of the Sabbath Day, when the Nazarenes had attempted His Life. The cousins who are called His sisters in the Gospel, seem to have been married and settled in Nazareth, but His "brothers" are never mentioned after this time as being directly connected with that place. St. Matthew sees in this removal from Capharnaum, and the marvellous preaching which followed, a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaias about the blessings to be showered on Galilee.¹⁰

The first incident which is now mentioned is the call of the four Apostles, Peter and Andrew, James and John, from their nets.¹¹ We know from St. John that they were already our Lord's disciples, that they had seen His first great miracle, and believed in Him in consequence, that they had also been His companions in His visit to Jerusalem for the feast of the Pasch, in the preaching in Judæa which had followed, and in His journey to Galilee through Samaria. They seem to have separated from Him at Cana, whence He went to Nazareth, and they to their homes in Capharnaum and its neighbourhood. This call, therefore, was not one which invited them to become His disciples in any ordinary way. It must have meant that He was about to start on some great evangelizing expe-

¹⁰ St. Matt. iv. 14.

¹¹ *Story of the Gospels*, § 29.

dition, in which they were to accompany Him. Thus it was a call which our Blessed Lady might well understand as presaging this new step in His course of preaching. The same conclusion might naturally occur to her from the incidents which immediately followed.

The Gospels then put before us a scene on the first Sabbath in Capharnaum, which seems to be meant as a direct contrast to that former Sabbath in Nazareth.¹² Our Lord teaches in the synagogue, and all present marvel, in the first place, at the authority of His teaching. That is, He spoke in His own name, and as having a right to interpret and define the law. There is a demoniac in the congregation, and the devil who possessed him cries out to our Lord, calling Him Jesus of Nazareth, "Art Thou come to destroy us? I know then Who Thou art, the Holy One of God." Our Lord will not allow him to speak, and casts him out at once. Here again the people marvel at His authority, for again He had used no exorcisms or prayers, as was usual with the Jewish exorcists, but had cast the devil forth in His own name. This miracle is followed by the raising of Peter's mother-in-law from her sick-bed, by a word. "He touched her hand, and the fever left her," and then when the sun set to mark the close of the sacred rest of the Sabbath, He seems to have healed all the sick in the city who were brought to the door of the house, where "all the city" was gathered together, to witness the healing "of all that were diseased and that were possessed with devils." It was as when,

¹² *Story of the Gospels*, § 30.

on the entrance of some great King into His capital after a victory, all the prisons are emptied of their captives, all debts and taxes remitted, all suits stopped, and plenty and rejoicing brought home to every single household by the bounty of the Sovereign.

This was but the beginning of the movement which now passed from city to city, village to village, all over the country. That same night, or early in the morning, our Lord stole out of the city into a desert place, when Peter and the rest followed to search for Him and found Him in prayer. It was natural that they should beseech Him to remain in Capharnaum, but He refused. He had other cities to preach in, to which He was sent. It is natural to think that the scene on the Sabbath at Capharnaum is given us as a specimen from which we may gather what was usual to our Lord at this time, what was the general magnificence of His bounties and the largeness of the exercise of His miraculous powers. "He went about all over Galilee teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all diseases and all infirmities among the people" and casting out devils. "And His fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought to Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and such as were possessed by devils, and lunatics, and those that had the palsy, and He healed them. And great multitudes followed Him from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judæa, and from beyond the Jordan."¹³ The words of the

¹³ St. Matt. iv. 24, 25.

Evangelist seem expressly chosen to denote the universality of the miracles and the immense popularity of the preaching. Both for the cure of disease and the dispossession of the devils, people were not content to wait till He came into their own neighbourhood, but brought to Him all who required healing or deliverance. And the crowds who followed Him to listen to His teaching came from every part of the Holy Land, Samaria alone excepted.

A career of beneficence and popularity such as this must have been, necessarily involves personal contact with successive multitudes of men, mixture with large crowds, incessant occupation, constant change of place, calls of attention to a number of cases at once, and other continual distractions and disturbances. It implies the moving amid continual applause, homage, importunities, and interruptions. While others who came across our Lord thus incidentally could see only the particular actions and listen to the particular sayings and teachings of the time being, a heart that always followed Him would see, much more, what was Divine and interior, the calm tranquil aim throughout at the glory of His Father and the good of souls, the unruffled peace amid so many changes, the unity of purpose which made change after change no distraction, the intense love which winged every word and animated every action, the continual self-abasement with which everything was offered with the utmost purity of intention as the service of the Son to the Father, of the creature to His Lord and His God. It would be the office of such a heart to note the invariable

sweetness, patience, and dignity, the unwearied toil, the unchanging readiness and tenderness with which every call was answered, while all the time the Sacred Heart knew what was in man, and could read the numberless shades and changes of intentions, the various degrees of sincerity, the lightness or fickleness or instability, the seriousness and the simplicity, which made the multitudes of the souls who drew nigh to our Lord so motley a collection in His sight. It needed a mind like that to appreciate and acknowledge in praise and gratitude the Divine versatility as well as uniformity of our Lord's method of dealing with souls, His infinite compassions and forbearances and longsufferings, His heavenly patience, His condescension in accepting homage which was not to endure, service which was not to persevere, as well as His keen hopeful welcome of so much that was promising only to an eye like His, which could discern the future Magdalene in the gay frivolous child of fashion, and the glorious Apostle and Evangelist in the open-handed publican.

It is easy to see how large a field was thus spread, to the mind of our Blessed Lady, as our Lord's work for souls and for the foundation of His Kingdom advanced day after day. She had been in the enjoyment of the most intimate converse with Him all His life, and it is only natural that her mind must have been enlarged wonderfully by her continual study of His ways and words and example. We have already said more than enough to show that it cannot be considered as any derogation to the exalted sanctity of the Apostles to think

that at this time they could not have had the capacity of understanding Him as they afterwards understood Him. And indeed, if they had advanced ever so rapidly in the course of the few weeks of their intercourse with Him, they would be themselves too actively engaged in dealing with the people to whom He preached, in leading individuals to Him, in arranging the crowds who came to be healed, and other such offices, to have the leisure requisite for the calm consideration and contemplation of all that was going on before them. It was to be the office of the Holy Ghost in after years to bring to their remembrance the sayings and doings of their Master, that they might thus profit by them to the full. But our Lady was already illuminated to an unparalleled extent, and it was therefore her natural office to let none of the beautiful and wonderful things wrought and said by our Lord pass without recognition. The Catholic Church strains herself in her yearly course of festivals, holy seasons, and liturgical and devotional observances, to commemorate one by one the footsteps of our Lord. But all that can be accomplished in this way, even by the Church in Heaven, must have passed first through the mind and heart of the Blessed Mother as she watched all these wonders and mercies.

In the same way it may be said concerning that marvellous treasury of teaching which is stored up for us by St. Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount, that all that is there contained of wisdom and holy love has not even yet, perhaps, been exhausted in the contemplations of the Church and her children. This Divine teaching is the great outpouring of the

Sacred Heart, acting as the legislator for the Kingdom which He was to found. It is now that He fulfils the type of Moses, the lawgiver of Sinai, but with an immense difference. The personal character of our Lord breathes in every word, His love for everything humble, lowly, poor, His zeal for justice, His love of peace and purity, His love for the Cross of which He could not yet speak openly. It was His way ever to look to the interior spirit and motive, to love the prayer of the heart, the humiliation of the heart, the hiddenness of charity and all good works. And again, it is His character that pictures itself to us in the warnings against judgment of others, and against the slightest unfor-givingness, and again in the encouragement to perfect reliance on the Providence of His Father, and consequent indifference to worldly and temporal cares. We see Him in the loving references to His Father's method in feeding the ravens, clothing the lilies of the field with beauty, and making His sun to shine and His rain to fall on the just and unjust alike. And towards the end of the Sermon, we find our Lord passing on to the familiar and proverbial language of which He was so fond, and almost formally beginning the great cycle of His parables. But to a heart like that of our Lady these teachings would not only be doubly precious as revealing His character, but still more as imparting that character to the whole system which He was founding, and which is so completely a reflection of Him for no reason more clearly than because it is so essentially founded on the precepts and counsels of this Sermon. Thus the Sermon would reflect to her mind the long

conversations at Nazareth in which we believe Him to have unfolded to her the principles and lineaments of the Christian Kingdom.¹⁴

The Sermon on the Mount, as we gather from the doctrine which it sets forth, cannot have been delivered very early in this first Galilæan Ministry of our Lord. Indeed, it is introduced by St. Matthew in words which seem to show that He had already a large multitude following Him from place to place, a circumstance which must be distinguished from that of the numbers who welcomed Him with gladness and enthusiasm as He passed through the country from town to town. These multitudes who followed Him must have done so for the sake of more continuous and advanced teaching than that which is contained in the exhortation to penance and belief in the Kingdom of Heaven. And the Sermon must be considered as a summary of such doctrine, intended for those who had already made their peace with God by repentance and accepted the simple articles of faith which were set before them.

This great Sermon has in every age always been a part of our Lord's teaching on which the saints have fed their souls with the most intense delight and the largest profit. It has never been exhausted by any, although the whole garden of the Church is full of the fruits which have sprung from its contemplation. It is certain that with regard to such portions of our Lord's gifts to the Church it is especially true, as it was said by Him, that to him that hath it shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly. That is,

¹⁴ *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 31—36.

the precepts herein contained are more and more fruitful in spiritual richness and beauty, in proportion to the growth and height in perfection which those who devote themselves to them have already attained. But at the time when that Sermon was delivered, there were not, perhaps, very many souls that were able to penetrate its beauties with the depth and fulness of perception which was afterwards attained by the Apostles and other chosen followers of our Lord. But He had a heart ever near Him, which could take in all that wonderful and most rich treasury of spiritual doctrine, and that heart was the heart of His Blessed Mother. We may almost say, that her character is drawn in the Beatitudes and in the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, as is the case with the character of our Lord Himself.

The narrative of the Evangelists places for us, directly after the Sermon on the Mount, a small number of miracles specially recorded, which seem to have a character of their own in keeping with the place in the unfolding of the Divine order of our Lord's manifestations in which they occur.¹⁵ There is probably some special purpose about every miracle that is related by the Evangelists, apart from the general intention of evidences of His Mission and exhibitions of His mercy which belongs alike to all the miracles. The loving study of this unfolding of the Divine plan must have been one for which our Lady was pre-eminently fitted, as well by her characteristic grace of consideration, as by the constant use she had made of that grace for so many years, and her altogether unrivalled opportunities. In the

¹⁵ *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 37—39.

case we have before us, we find that the miracles which may be fixed with some certainty at this time are three. The first is the miraculous fishing in the Lake of Tiberias, when St. Peter, after labouring with his companions to no purpose for the whole previous night, let down his nets at the word of our Lord, and was rewarded with the capture of an immense number of fishes. The second miracle is that of the cleansing of the leper whom our Lord touched, and whom He sent to show himself to the High Priest. The third is that of the cure of the paralytic, who was let down by his four bearers through the tiles of the roof into the court of the house where our Lord was teaching in the presence of a great number of scribes and elders, who had assembled from various parts of the country for the purpose of hearing Him. This miracle our Lord made the occasion of the exercise of a new power, beyond that of healing, namely, the forgiveness of sins, and He made the miracle itself the proof that He possessed that power.

To the ordinary eye these may have been miracles like any others, acts of mercy and power showing generally that God was with Him Who worked them. In the case of more thoughtful minds, they would turn the attention to other things beside themselves, as, in the case of the draught of fishes, to the promise that the Apostles were to be made by our Lord fishers of men, in the case of the leper, to the significance of the legal precepts of which our Lord enjoined on the leper the strict observance, and in the case of the paralytic, to the claim advanced and proved by our Lord that the Son of Man

had power on earth to forgive sins. But it would require an intelligence more enlightened than that even of the close followers of our Lord to read in these sayings and circumstances the full meaning which they had in His Sacred Heart, as, in the case of the first, the glories of the Apostolical ministry for the conversion of souls, when it is enjoined by our Lord and prospered by His grace, or, in the case of the second, the principle of the submission of sin, even when cleansed away and cancelled by Divine grace, to the judgment of the ministers of the Church for absolution, and, in the case of the third, the kindred truth of the commission of the power of absolving sins, not to angels, but to men like ourselves. But these miracles must have been to our Lady the unfolding of these portions of the Divine counsel to an extent of which no other soul was capable, and thus she was enabled to give back at once to our Lord the homage of a perfect intelligence, a praise that could embrace all the riches of His bounty, and a most loving and adoring gratitude. Nor would she fail to rejoice most lovingly over the incidents which seem to have followed closely on the last-named miracle, namely, the call of St. Matthew to the Apostolate, and the characteristic and generous simplicity of the disciple thus called in the banquet which he gave to his own friends, as well to our Lord, as if to celebrate the grace which was to enable him to leave the world behind him.¹⁶

We may pause here for the moment, as the next onward step in our Lord's course opens to us a new

¹⁶ *Story of the Gospels*, § 30.

phase of the conditions under which His Ministry had now to be carried on. What has been said about this the earliest period of His Galilæan preaching may be enough to show that we have good reason for concluding that, as His course advanced from stage to stage, it displayed ever new beauties of beneficence and of wisdom. We have only to think of our Lady as watching all that passed, with the same careful consideration as the early mysteries of the Holy Infancy, but with an intelligence ripened and enlarged with new powers of penetration and grasp by the very diligence with which it had been exercised, as time went on, and then we come to see how her life must have been a succession of magnificent revelations of the greatness and the wisdom and the condescension of her Son. As each phase of His mortal course succeeded in its turn, there was ever a new display of Divine powers and attributes, of the boundless humility and tenderness of His Sacred Heart, of His love for His Father, His love for men, His zeal for souls, His delicate and patient contrivances for winning them, and of the exertion of His power for helping them and saving them.

The contemplations of our Lady on these scenes were always the same and yet always fresh, because He was the centre of them all, and in each succeeding portion of His Life He was working under new conditions and in the midst of a new world. The surroundings of the Infancy were different indeed from those of the Hidden Life, and the circumstances of the Public Life, again, were altogether different from those of the period which had gone before. Even

in the features of the Public Life itself there was continual change, for the bright successes of its opening were not repeated invariably unto its close, the attitude of the people and of the rulers changed, and these changes produced corresponding variations in His own demeanour and conduct towards them. The scenes of His labours changed also, for every town, and part of a large popular district like Galilee has always characteristics of its own, and Galilee was not Jerusalem, nor was Judæa like Peræa. In truth, every few weeks or months of the Public Life had their own character, both in our Lord's conduct and in the places and populations among which it was spent, and His bearing and conduct under all these successive phases involved on His part ever new manifestations of Himself.

There was but one soul capable of drinking in all the showers of light and instruction which were thus falling from our Lord, and that soul was His Mother's, whose office it had been from the first to devote herself to such contemplations. We may also feel certain of one further truth, which is directly connected with the subject which we have taken in hand. It is impossible that our Lady's mind and thoughts could have been so continually occupied on these manifestations of our Lord without the consequence in her of an immense increase of intelligence concerning Him. It is well known that St. Luke speaks of His increasing in wisdom and grace, meaning that His external manifestation of wisdom and grace, which was always increasing, made Him seem to grow ever more and more wise and full of grace because of that manifestation. He

could grow in the eyes of His Mother, day after day, in this sense, she must have watched His growth from the very beginning. But in no period of His Life was this ever fresh manifestation more rapid than at that at which we have now arrived. This shows us how great must have been the increase of Mary's knowledge of Him at this time, when He was, as it were, flashing light and truth, grace and mercy, on every side of Him, every single soul of all the multitudes with whom He had to deal striking some spark of light from His gracious presence. But we must remember, in the second place, that the heart of Mary was not one in which there could ever be an increase of knowledge of our Lord without an increase of love, of imitation, and so of grace. She knew Him only to love Him, she knew Him more and more, only to love Him more and more. Thus the crowded busy months of His first Galilæan circuit were to her a time of immense advance, the measure of which would not have yielded even to the quiet uneventful years spent in the Holy House at Nazareth.

•

CHAPTER V.

MARY DURING THE SECOND YEAR'S MINISTRY.

IT is well known that we cannot fix with precise certainty the dates of many of the chief incidents in the Public Life. The history has to be made up from four different narratives, in each of which there are large periods of silence, and which do not contain, in all cases, indications of time sufficiently clear to make a perfect chronological arrangement possible, or, at least, certain. But it is quite possible to arrange the events which are thus set before us by the Evangelists in an order as to the accuracy of which there can be but little serious doubt, for the chief distinctive features of the successive periods into which the history divides itself are sufficiently plain to patient investigation. That is, we can be certain about the order of all the principal events, although we cannot say, with equal certainty, in what month of each of the three years those events are to be placed. The doubts that remain are, therefore, more concerning the intervals between this and that occurrence than concerning their relative chronological position. And the chief features of each successive period are clearly marked.

After the Sermon on the Mount, which may be considered as the close of one period of preaching

and the beginning of another, and after the significant miracles of which mention has just been made, we find another phase of our Lord's course put before us, in which a note is for the first time struck which sounds on with increasing power throughout the rest of the Public Life. That note is the note of opposition and persecution. Our Lord now appears before us as the object of both, and we have thus to study His conduct under a new light. Up to the time of which we have been speaking, there had been little of this. We remember that He had not been welcomed, to say the least, by the authorities at Jerusalem, who had already shown themselves unwilling to take part in the movement of penance and reformation of which St. John had given the signal. There was here a presage of hostility, not hostility itself. It was to avoid the notice of the rulers at Jerusalem that our Lord had retired, after but a short stay in Judæa, to the more distant Galilee, and had made that populous province the scene of His Ministry. Many months had now passed since the beginning of that course of preaching by our Lord. His fame as a Wonderworker and a Teacher had spread throughout the whole country, far and near, and people flocked to Galilee for the purpose of hearing Him, even from the most distant parts. It is certain, therefore, that He was most prominently before the public eye, and that His preaching and Person must have furnished matter for a large amount of inquiry and discussion. We do not find in the narratives of the Evangelists at this time, anything that can give us certain and positive information as to the attitude of the rulers

at Jerusalem towards Him. On the occasion of the healing of the paralytic, we find mention of the presence of Pharisees at Jerusalem, but although there is murmuring among them at the novel claim to the power of forgiving sins, there is as yet no decided hostility among the scribes, at least in Galilee. The question put to Him and to His disciples about eating with publicans, fasting, and the like, were not unnatural, and do not of necessity imply ill will.¹

Humanly speaking, everything as to the success of our Lord's Mission depended on the manner in which He was received by the ecclesiastical authorities. When the Apostles went to preach in heathen countries, the case was different, except so far as there might be found there a class of priests, who lived and fattened on the profits which they derived from the service of the temples. But the Jewish hierarchy was the institution of our Lord Himself, and He bade the people, in His last discourses, do whatever they were told to do by these rulers, who sat in the seat of Moses. Our Lord came to fulfil, not to destroy, the Law and the Prophets, and the Chief Priests were the living representatives of the one and the authorized interpreters of the other. Whatever might be the character of the men at that time occupying the chief positions in the hierarchy, the hierarchy itself was venerable, and to be treated with all due respect. But these men, as we have already seen in part, and shall see still more plainly, failed most signally and disastrously to understand and act up to their mission, and this was, in truth, the turning and decisive point in the external history

¹ *Story of the Gospels*, § 40.

of our Lord's preaching. They tried at least to be neutral, but neutral they could not be without losing their position, and then they seized the first pretext that presented itself to plunge into most unscrupulous and most disastrous hostility.

The time was now come for some call to be made on these rulers of Jerusalem to take some decisive attitude, and, as far as in them lay, give the people some guidance by their example as to the authority claimed by our Lord. What the witness was which they were meant to give cannot be doubted. But it is also clear that they were not prepared to give it. Their own worldly interests, their evil lives, their pride, their ambition, all stood in the way of their conversion, and without a true conversion to God they could do nothing for the Mission of His Son. This was to become manifest sooner or later, as our Lord said of them about this time, "He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me, scattereth."² The issue that was at stake was of enormous importance, and it was practically decided in the few weeks which passed after the Sermon on the Mount had been delivered.

Our Lord, as it seems, went up to Jerusalem for the Pasch, a year after that festival on which He had signalized the beginning of His authoritative teaching in Jerusalem by the solemn cleansing of the Temple. This action of His could not be palatable to the Jewish authorities, but they contented themselves at that time with the question about His authority. A year had now passed, and all the country was ringing with His Name. We have no

² St. Matt. xii. 30.

full account of the occurrences of this Pasch, which is not mentioned by any of the three first Evangelists. Moreover, St. John, to whom we owe what we know about it, does not say distinctly that it was the feast of the Pasch rather than any other. He mentions it only for the remarkable occurrences which it relates. His narrative tells us of the miracle wrought by our Lord, entirely unsolicited, on the impotent man at the Probatic Pool, and the injunction laid on the person thus healed by our Lord to take up his bed and walk. This, as our Lord must have known, was an infringement of the law of the Sabbath, on which day the miracle was wrought. These circumstances are valuable to us, because they show us that our Lord worked the miracle with the direct aim of startling the Jews, and bringing on the long discussion with them which is related by the Evangelist in his fifth chapter. St. John tells us that this miracle wrought on the Sabbath day was the cause why the Jewish authorities persecuted our Lord, but he goes on immediately to mention another cause, namely, that He claimed to be the Son of God. The discussion which is given to us in that fifth chapter is of the utmost importance to the understanding of the history. In the course of it our Lord sums up the various evidences on which they ought to have believed in the Divine Mission—the witness of St. John, the voice of the Father, the witness of His miraculous works, the witness of the Sacred Scriptures, and even of Moses, in whom they trusted. “For if you did believe Moses, you would perhaps believe Me also, for he wrote of Me.”³ And

3 St. John v. 46.

He also puts his finger on the moral root of their incredulity, their love of human honour, and the like.

From this time, as has been said, the persecution of our Lord was a foregone conclusion with the authorities at Jerusalem. The incidents which follow on this time all converge in their witness to this fact. Those that are mentioned are such as the complaint made against the disciples for plucking and rubbing in their hands the ears of corn on the Sabbath which immediately followed—a fact which seems to prove what has been said above, that the feast just spoken of was the feast of the Pasch. Then follows the miracle on the man with the withered hand in the Synagogue, also on the Sabbath, after His return to Galilee, which is immediately succeeded by the conspiracy against our Lord, in which the Scribes and Pharisees joined themselves with the Herodians, that is, the political servants of the tetrarch in whose dominion Galilee lay. The plot had already gone so far as to aim at our Lord's destruction, and when the ecclesiastical and civil authorities were in formal league for this purpose, it was not likely that an occasion for its execution would not soon offer itself.

It is natural that contemplative souls should try to enter into the Sacred Heart of our Lord, and consider with what affections of loving grief and sorrowful disappointment He could regard the line of conduct which was now being recklessly adopted by His own priests, the very persons to whose lips it was that knowledge was committed who were the shepherds of the flock and the lights of the world.

To our Lord the whole future was present, and He could see beforehand all the issues of misery here and eternal ruin hereafter which were involved in the obstinacy of these priests and rulers, and their immense responsibility for the loss of thousands of souls and the practical closing of the way of salvation to many who would be influenced by their example. Alas! they represented to Him a long line of such miseries, lasting through each generation of the Church, as long as the world was to endure, and in that future those who were to be the enemies of their own souls and the destroyers of the souls of others, would be not ministers of the Temple or rulers of the Synagogue, but priests who had served at Christian altars, or even occupied seats of authority in the Catholic Church. No one could enter into these thoughts and sorrows of our Lord, no one could aid Him, so to say, by the most fervent and earnest intercession for these men, except His Blessed Mother. The disciples could not be warned of the danger into which these rulers of the people were running without some chance of scandal, and our Lord was always most careful in the way in which He spoke about these Priests.

Although the distant future was not open to her intelligence, Mary could perfectly understand the crisis that had now come, the issue that was now at stake, and all the possible consequences which might follow if these priests persisted in their hostility to the Gospel. She loved her nation, she loved the Temple and its holy services, she loved the rulers and chief priests for the sake of their holy office, and she was in a peculiar manner the child of the

sanctuary. Her prayers would naturally rise for them with intense fervour, even if she had not known, by any instruction from our Lord, how great a cross was being prepared for Him in their dealings with Him. The souls who have inherited her special work of intercession in the Church are always very eager in their prayers for those who are in the dangerous posts of authority, whether in Church or State, and many a holy and laborious prelate has been helped on his way and shielded from a thousand perils by their intercessions and penances. The founder, so to say, of the holy tradition of such intercessions must have been our Blessed Lady. They are an especial work which belongs to her.

There is something almost appalling in the thought of the Divine patience with which our Lord dealt with these His most bitter enemies throughout the whole of His earthly Ministry, the care which He took of their reputation and honour, the respect which He bade the people pay them, while at the same time He did not spare rebukes and reproaches and warnings when such were due to them from Him. The same wonderful patience is observable in the manner in which He continually allows Himself to be defeated and disappointed by the coldness, the jealousies, the narrowness, the exclusiveness, the pettinesses of those to whom great positions and fertile opportunities of good are committed in the Church, positions which prevent others from setting on foot works of zeal and charity with, at all events, the same prospect of success. Many such opportunities, if neglected when they occur, seldom return. The Church is naturally an aggressive and ever

advancing kingdom, and her failures, such as they are, come more from the good that might be done and is not done, than from positive wickedness and evil.

Here there would be another large field for the earnest intercession of Mary. No doubt her prayers were offered with the greatest intensity and fervour for these priests and rulers, as they are offered now for those who fill in the Christian Church the position of responsibility then held by such as Annas and Caiphas. But we must remember that what has been said of the ecclesiastical rulers was also true, in its measure, of the people at large, and even of those among whom our Lord had now for some time been preaching, and teaching, and working miracles without number. We cannot lay on the rulers at Jerusalem the blame of all that coldness and dullness and insensibility of which our Lord complained, and which made Him, as we shall see, adopt very soon a more reserved manner of speaking to the people to whom the priceless treasures of wisdom contained in the Sermon on the Mount had been so freely offered. We cannot lay on these rulers the hardness of heart which brought down on the cities which had been so highly favoured by Him, as Corozain and Bethsaida, and on Capharnaum itself, those mournful denunciations of which the Evangelists are soon to give us an account. The warfare in which our Lord was engaged was most severe and deadly. The light had come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, for their works were evil. The battle was raging in every single soul of all those who in any way came across our Lord. All depended on

the line taken by each independent human will. Our Lord and the angels were on the one side, Satan and his hosts on the other, and the poor feeble souls in whom the decision lay were like men half awake in the midst of a raging fire, or on the deck of a foundering ship, roused against their will, overwhelmed by drowsiness, wishing for nothing so much as to be let alone as they were. It is not wonderful that God should have given so much weight under such anxious circumstances to the prayers of Mary, that, as one phase after another of this terrible struggle developed itself, each became a fresh call upon her charity and zeal in the work which was so peculiarly her own.

Soon after our Lord's return from Jerusalem, after the feast of which mention has been made, we find the Evangelists attributing to Him a certain change in His manner of dealing with the people, which is no doubt to be accounted for by the considerations contained in the last chapter. It is after the confederacy against Him on the part of the ecclesiastical rulers and the Herodians that we find St. Matthew speaking of His withdrawing Himself from the notice of His enemies, and applying to Him the beautiful prophecy of Isaiah which foretold that He is not "to contend nor to cry out, neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets. The bruised reed He shall not break, and smoking flax He shall not extinguish, till He send forth judgment unto victory, and in His Name shall the Gentiles hope."⁴ He continued His miraculous cures, and His teaching of the people, and He also cast out the devils, whom He enjoined not to make Him known.

⁴ Isaiah xlii. 1.

We now, therefore, enter on a new period in the Public Life, the incidents and features of which, as they pass before us, will suggest how many ever new and urgent calls they would make on the ever-watchful heart of the Blessed Mother, whose part in the whole of our Lord's active Ministry was to aid mainly by her prayers. The thoughts which have already come before us as to the preceding portion of His Ministry must be present with us as we advance, and it will not be necessary to go at any length into the details of this anxious time, the simple enumeration of which will be enough to remind us of the corresponding effects which they must have had in guiding, in this or in that direction, the intercession of our Lady. When we come to understand that the intense and energetic prayer of Mary followed like a shadow on the activity or the suffering of her Son, we shall understand how this is taken for granted in the Gospels, and furnishes, in great measure, the reason why her name is so seldom mentioned, never, indeed, except for some special purpose apart from her general and continual occupation by His side.

The special features of the period on which we thus enter are very striking in themselves. It is now that we hear of the first formation of the Apostolical Body. It was made up, in the first place, of the disciples who had joined our Lord before the first Pasch—Peter and Andrew, James and John, Philip and Nathanael, better known by his patronymic, Bartholomew. Then come Matthew and Thomas, whose call was subsequent to that of the first six. The remaining four consist of three of our Lord's cousins or relations, Simon and Jude, James the

son of Alpheus or Clopas, and the future traitor, Judas Iscariot. They now were all to be our Lord's constant companions, and had power to heal sicknesses and cast out devils. A great onward step indeed was this in the formation of the new kingdom, and in every one of those thus called our Lady must have had a very deep personal interest. Her prayers for them were the beginnings of the intercessions of the Church for all those called to the Apostolical Ministry, in every generation and in every department of the work. She must have seen, moreover, that our Lord had now taken a decided step onwards, which must make Him even more obnoxious than before to the rulers at Jerusalem. For the formal call of the Apostles must have produced the impression that He meant to give an organization of His own to the mass of His followers, independent of any existing authority or institution. When He was taken before Annas, it is said that He was questioned concerning His disciples and His doctrine. The beginning of the formation of the Church as a separate power and living body dates from this time.⁵

After the call of the Apostles, our Lord delivered the great teaching which is preserved for us by St. Luke, and which is known as the Sermon on the Plain, the Evangelist having specially mentioned the spot on which it was delivered, for the purpose, as it seems, of distinguishing it from the Sermon on the Mount. It follows that Sermon generally, but it omits large portions, and is characterized by the more severe and reserved tone which belongs to the public teachings of this period. Here again was an

⁵ *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 46—49.

occasion for fervid prayer that the good seed thus plentifully sown might not be wasted. After this our Lord returned for a short visit to Capharnaum, and, while there, healed the servant of the Gentile centurion by a word, according to the beautiful prayer of his master, which has been adopted by the Church in her liturgy as the best expression for her children of devotion just before receiving Holy Communion. It may have been noticed in St. Matthew's application of the prophecy of Isaias lately quoted, how he selects words which speak of the hope of the Gentiles in our Lord. Here was an instance in a Gentile of faith which had not been found by Him in Israel, and which gave Him occasion to utter the famous words about those who were to come from East and West, and sit down with the saints in the Kingdom of God.⁶ All this might turn the prayers of our Blessed Lady for those countless multitudes of the Gentiles, who were standing, in humble expectation, outside the door which was so soon to be opened wide to all.

The next miracle in the history is the raising of the son of the widow of Naim, the first recorded instance of resurrection from the dead at our Lord's word.⁷ It is probably for this reason that St. Luke mentions it as he has immediately after to mention the mission of the disciples of St. John Baptist to our Lord, asking Him the formal question whether He was the Messiah Who was to come, the answer to which question contained a reference to miracles of the class to which that at Naim belonged. We do not know that our Lady could have been present at

⁶ *Story of the Gospels*, § 50. ⁷ *Ibid*, § 51.

the miracle, but her heart must have been moved intensely by such cases as that of the lonely mother, whose condition so closely resembled her own. The visit of the disciples of St. John was clearly brought about by him in order that his disciples, who were soon to be left without his guidance, might see and hear for themselves just what they did. It had not been necessary, in the counsels of God, to authenticate the mission of St. John by any miraculous signs. His austerity and holiness, and the answer which his preaching found in the consciences of his hearers, where the great truths to which he appealed were indelibly written. It was therefore something new for his disciples to witness the miracles of our Lord, Who bade them carry back the account of these to St. John in words which referred them to the passage in Isaias in which they had been predicted as signs of the Messias.⁸ Thus the blessed Precursor would be enabled to bear what was to be his last witness to our Lord. Our Lord took the opportunity to speak of him in language of the highest praise, saying that there had not risen "among them that are born of women" a greater than John Baptist, though "he that is the lesser in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he,"⁹ and the like. He added the words in which the men of that generation, who had found fault both with St. John and with Himself to the children in the market-place, whom nothing could please.

These words were soon followed by those already referred to in denunciation of the blindness and abuse of opportunities of which the cities to which He

⁸ Isaias xxix. 18, 19; xxxv. 5, 6; lxi. 1; xxvi. 19.

⁹ *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 52, 53.

had preached, and where He had wrought so many miracles had been guilty. It was to be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon and Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for them. And these severe words, again, were soon followed by those others, full of tenderness and joy, in which He thanked His Father for that arrangement of His Providence by which the truths of the Kingdom had been hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto little ones. "All things are delivered to Me by My Father, and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father, neither doth any one know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal Him."¹⁰ And then came forth that gracious invitation, "Come to Me, all you that labour, and are burthened, and I will refresh you. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls. For My yoke is sweet, and My burthen light." And we learn from that comparison of the Gospels which is the special work of the Harmonist, that this gracious call was directly followed by Magdalene, who came, when she heard where He was, in the Pharisee's house, to throw herself at His feet in search of forgiveness, washing His feet with her tears, anointing them with her ointment, and wiping them with the hair of her head.¹¹

If Magdalene was so great a treasure as she is believed to have been to the Sacred Heart of our Lord, it is easy to see how dear she must have become to His Blessed Mother, who would watch over her as the first and the pattern of penitents

¹⁰ *Story of the Gospels*, § 54.

¹¹ *Ibid.* § 55.

devoting themselves entirely and without reserve to the service of her Master. It is now that we hear of the formation of a small band of pious women, most of them ladies who had received great boons at His hand, who made it their business to follow the course of our Lord and His Apostles, ministering to them of their substance. After the selection of the Twelve to be His inseparable companions, it became almost necessary that some such provision should be made. For our Lord might readily have found for Himself such food and hospitality as He required, but a band of twelve followers made a large number to impose on any one who might be inclined to entertain Him. It was also better that the Apostles should be kept, now that their more formal and continuous training had begun, as much together as possible, and, at the same time, apart from other people. It must remain uncertain whether our Blessed Lady went about with these holy women as their Mother and Superior. There would be many other useful offices which they would have to discharge, besides that of providing for the temporal wants of the Apostolic band, for there must have been always a large number of their own sex seeking instruction and guidance and introduction to our Lord. It might seem natural that our Blessed Lady should have been at their head. On the other hand, if she was set apart, so to speak, that she might be the perpetual companion of our Lord's thoughts and designs, and the continual intercessor for the wants of the souls who might come under the influence of His teaching, the life of activity and constant external employment might be more distracting for her than was meet. It happens that the

next actual mention which is made of her seems to show that a short time after the point which we have now reached she was still in the company of our Lord's near relatives, who are called in the Gospels His brothers, and therefore, at Capharnaum.

The next incidents in the period before us are such as mark the ever-increasing malignity of the enemies of our Lord. It is now that we meet for the first time with the calumny set on foot by the Scribes and Pharisees about the league which they declared to exist between Him and Beelzebub, in virtue of which He cast out devils. It is now also that we find them beginning to beset Him with their demands for a sign from Heaven as a proof of His mission. These marks of hostility drew from our Lord very severe though calm words, in which He spoke of the extreme danger of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which could not be allowed to pass unpunished either in this world or in the next. He told them of the miserable state of the man out of whom the devil had been cast, only to return again with seven others more wicked than himself. He spoke of the sign of Jonas, and of the rebuke which the men of that generation would receive from the men of Nineve and from the Queen of the South.¹²

The Evangelists tell us that it was while our Lord was speaking on this subject to the multitude, that the incident occurred which brings us to the one direct mention of our Lady's name in the course of their narratives at this time. It was, apparently, at a time when He was returning from one of His

¹² *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 56, 57.

missionary circuits to Capharnaum for a short visit. As He was still preaching to the people, His Mother and His brethren came to the place, desirous of speaking with Him. The object of their visit is not given, for it was not important for the purpose of the Evangelists to relate it. The reason why this incident is mentioned is quite obvious. It is mentioned because it furnishes the opportunity of exhibiting our Lord's example in the case of persons engaged in the Apostolic Ministry, when some interruption occurs on account of the natural claims of family duty and affection. There could not have been many such occasions in the course of our Lord's teaching, and this it is that makes this one so precious to us. It was very natural that our Blessed Lady and His brethren should hasten to meet Him as soon as they heard of His approach, if He was now returning to them. And perhaps they had some special reason for wishing to speak with Him immediately, such as might be the desire to warn Him of the danger that He might incur from His ever-watchful enemies. He was comparatively safe from these when He was going about from town to town in Galilee, for they could never be certain of the course He would take, and wherever He was, He had a great multitude of followers with Him. He would not be so safe in a town like Capharnaum. But whatever was the object of our Lady and His brethren, which we are not told, He was engaged in teaching the multitude, and could not be interrupted, although she may not have known how He was engaged. Thus she gave Him the great opportunity of leaving behind an example

which has been most fruitful of good in all ages of the Church. "And answering, He said, Who is My Mother and My brethren? And looking round about on them who sat about Him, He said, Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, of My Father that is in Heaven, he is My brother and My sister and My mother."¹³

It need hardly be said that no one would rejoice more than our Blessed Lady at the thought that she had given an occasion to so pregnant an example of indifference to human ties on the part of our Lord. As this incident has been laid hold by the enemies of the honour of our Lady, it may be worth while to remark that, to the eyes of the world and of the multitude, He was in exactly the same relation to her and to those who were called His brethren as any one else to his mother and brethren after the flesh. It would not, therefore, be reasonable to conclude that our Lord meant to deny to her any honour or deference which might be due to her on grounds which the people knew nothing of, such as her incomparable sanctity and closeness to Him, and the like. If He had acted in any other way, He might have given the same false impression as might have resulted, if He had left the school of the Temple, when He was twelve years of age, at her call, without setting forth clearly that He was independent of all earthly ties when the business of His Father was concerned. And He might not only have left a false impression as to His dependence on her, but He would have left behind Him in His own conduct a sanction for the mischievous

¹³ St. Matt. xii. 46—50; St. Mark iii. 31—36.

doctrine that parents have a right to be attended to by their children even when engaged in the functions of the sacred ministry. Thus the meaning of the whole incident is to be gathered from the first words of St. Matthew, "While He was yet speaking to the crowd."

So far it is quite clear that our Lord could have meant nothing disparaging to His Mother, but only to assert the pre-eminent rights and duties of the sacred ministry of the Word of God. Another question is sometimes raised, because some writers have been inclined to impute some imperfection to our Blessed Lady on account of her simple presence on this occasion, as if it implied presumption, or interference, or impatience, and the like. The mere formation of such a surmise would be impossible to any one who had a right conception of our Lady's pre-eminent virtues, and especially of her humility. To those who have such a conception, it will be natural to interpret the circumstances in accordance therewith, and it is perfectly gratuitous to interpret them otherwise. Our Lady was occasionally left in ignorance of certain facts about our Lord belonging to a class which was usually not hidden from her, as was the case in the mystery of the Twelfth Year, of which mention has just been made. She may not have known how our Lord was occupied, or she may have made known her desire to speak with Him, having some good reason for doing so, without intending Him to be interrupted in His discourse. A score of surmises may be formed as to these matters, quite as reasonable as any that have ever been formed so as to impute

some imperfection to her, and far more so. But the Evangelists simply tell us the facts and no more. Their object was to put forward the saying of our Lord about those who do the will of His Father Who is in Heaven. If His Mother had not been there, the chief point of the saying would be lost, and thus the occasion for this most precious example and instruction could be furnished by no one but herself.

Moreover, it is clear that this incident happened most opportunely. Our Lord was now beginning to be exposed to the effects of the persecution which had been organized against Him by the scribes and priests at Jerusalem, whose emissaries, or representatives, in Galilee had come to an understanding with the officials of the civil government, that He was to be got rid of in some as yet undetermined way. The influence of the priests had to some extent told on the people, though it was impossible to destroy His influence and prestige, even by the malignant calumnies which were put in circulation about Him. His miracles still attracted, and the charm of His Person was the same as ever. But it was becoming clear that to follow Him, and much more, to follow Him at all closely, might soon require much courage and great detachment from the world and ordinary earthly ties. It was soon after this that He told one who volunteered to be His follower, that the foxes had holes and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man had not where to lay His head. And to another He had refused permission to go and bury his father before joining Him. He could hardly have used the latter words with equal effect if He had just left off His preach-

ing to the people to receive a visit of affection from His Mother.

The same kind of detachment which was enjoined on the occasion when the disciple was not allowed to go to his father's grave, was to be enjoined also in very strong language when our Lord, soon after this, gave to the Apostles the great instruction as to the Apostolic Life which St. Matthew records in his tenth chapter. We can thus see how it was that He thought it well to lay down the principle of detachment so strongly on this occasion, and also how this incident stood out from a number of others in the minds of the Evangelists. They could have told us, beyond a doubt, a thousand anecdotes of our Lord's tender love and deference towards His Mother, but these were not so necessary for the instruction of the Christian people. His love and reverence for her were matters of course. His severity in asserting the principle here asserted was all the more noteworthy.

There are two more considerations to be urged before we quit this incident. First, the direct tendency of our Lord's words is not simply to declare the comparative insignificance of merely earthly and natural ties, even to Himself. If He had meant no more than that, He would not have used the language which He did use. What He did say was that His disciples, and those who did the will of His Father in Heaven, were His brothers and His sisters and His mother. That implies the closest and most affectionate union between Himself and His disciples, that He had nothing more dear to Him than those who did His Father's will. This is

a positive statement of infinite value to us, and it is a statement which must have rejoiced our Lady's Heart as truly as it expressed the feelings of our Lord's Heart. Mary did not wish to have His love to herself, she wished, as far as possible, that He should be able to love all as He loved her. And again, because she was His natural Mother, she was not the less His disciple. Because her womb had borne Him and her breasts had given Him suck, she was not precluded from gaining that higher title to His love and to union with Him which was to rest on her faithful obedience to the will of His Father. On the contrary, her great privileges and her great sanctity were all founded on her selection as His Mother. Those who believe that she was a mere involuntary instrument in bringing about the physical part of the Incarnation, may see in these words something of disparagement to her. For she was near and dear to Him, far more for her spiritual graces and incomparable virtues, than because she was His Mother after the flesh, if nothing else was to be considered. Those who understand her real greatness, and the dealings of God with her, and her faithfulness to His grace, will see in the words now used by our Lord the most powerful of all reasons for her pre-eminent dearness to Him.

CHAPTER VI.

MARY DURING THE TRAINING OF THE APOSTLES.

WE have now reached a point in our Lord's course of preaching which may be called a time of comparative gloom. It extends from the time when the presence of hostility and the danger of persecution have an evident influence on His movements, and to some extent fetter His activity, to the time when He throws aside much of the reserve and secresy which He had, in consequence, begun to practise, and seems to brave the enemies whom He had before to some extent seemed to endeavour to escape. The point at which He thus finally threw aside all attempt at winning His enemies round, or at least of avoiding their hostility, by comparative retirement and obscurity, is to be fixed, as is clear from the Gospels, at the Confession of St. Peter. The chief features of the period of which we speak, after what has been dealt with in the last chapter, are various in character, and embrace many of the most splendid and momentous acts and teachings of our Lord. It may be well to enumerate them first, and then to make our remarks on each.

The first thing here specially mentioned by the Evangelists is that our Lord now began to teach the people in parables only.¹ The reason which He

¹ *Story of the Gospels*, § 58.

gave for this change, which attracted the attention and questionings of the Apostles, is mentioned, as well as a number of the Parables themselves which were delivered at this time. After these parables, we have an account of not much more than a day's space which is full of marvellous incidents. He crosses the Lake after the teaching is over, stilling the storm on His night voyage. On the other side of the Lake He delivers their victims from the legion of devils, casts them out into the swine, who immediately drown themselves in the Lake, and is entreated by the people of the place to depart out of their coasts. Crossing the Lake again, He gives an answer to the disciples of St. John, heals the woman with an issue of blood, raises the daughter of Jairus from the dead, and heals the blind and dumb men who are brought to Him in the house. He departed at once, and we find Him next at Nazareth, on what seems to have been His last visit, without honour in His own country, His miraculous powers fettered, as far as was possible, by the unbelief of His townsfolk. Then we are told of His compassion on the multitude, who were as sheep not having a shepherd. This leads to the mission of the Twelve Apostles, who are sent out two and two, and to whom our Lord gives the long and pregnant instruction already mentioned. The Apostles go forth, and our Lord also begins a circuit of His own. A little earlier than this, the murder of St. John Baptist by Herod had taken place, and when the mission of the Apostles, or other facts relating to our Lord, had drawn the tyrant's attention to Him, Herod is said to have thought that our Lord

was St. John risen from the dead, and the anxiety of this reckless debauchee must have added a new danger to those which had already gathered around His course.²

The return of the Apostles to our Lord, which took place about this time, was followed by His withdrawing with them into a desert-place. As the crowds hastened after our Lord, the occasion was furnished for the first great miracle of the loaves, when five thousand men were fed on five loaves and two fishes, and this magnificent display of power and mercy led at once to the miracle of the walking on the waters, in order to return to the other side of the Lake, and to the great discourse held in the Synagogue of Capharnaum, in which our Lord laid down so distinctly the doctrine of the Blessed Sacrament. The other incidents of this time are, first, a certain number of miracles scattered over a considerable space of time, which have a character of their own. About some of them our Lord either makes a difficulty, as in the case of the daughter of the Syrophœnician woman, or finds one, as it appears, in the want of faith of the people concerned, as in the case of the deaf and dumb man healed in Decapolis, or in some other circumstance, as in the man cured at Bethsaida. He is always anxious that His miracles should not be made known. In the midst of these moments of difficulty we find the second splendid miracle of the multiplication of the loaves for the four thousand men, a miracle elicited, as it seems, from our Lord by His own infinite compassion, and not solicited either by

² *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 58—71.

the people or the disciples, though the latter had witnessed the former miracle of the same kind, and the people may have heard of it. This miracle is followed by the warning given by our Lord against the leaven of the Pharisees, which was not at first understood by the disciples. Earlier than this, He had held a discussion with the Pharisees about traditions, in which He had laid down some doctrines which must have been very novel to them. At length this period is terminated by the great confession of faith on the part of St. Peter, and the declaration immediately made to him that he was the Rock on which the Church was to be built, and that our Lord would give to him the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the first time at which our Lord ever spoke about the Church which He was to found.³

We have now to consider any points in the foregoing list of incidents as to which it may be natural to suppose that our Blessed Lady had a special occasion for action, in that way in which action was open to her. The whole character of this period could not be lost upon her. It must have come home to her with daily increasing clearness, that our Lord was becoming the mark for very bitter and unscrupulous hostility at the hands of men who wielded great power, which they would not shrink from using to the utmost. She must have seen also the increasing dulness and heedlessness of the people, qualities in themselves mainly negative, but as mischievous in their results as others which were positively bad. She would understand His reasons

³ *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 72—81.

for withholding the full and open teaching to which He had before accustomed them. The subject of the parables was, mainly, the characteristics of God's action in the great work of disseminating and spreading the Gospel, the manner in which the preaching of the truth was met by various classes, the dangers to which it was exposed, and which hindered its success, or the effect which it was to produce on the world at large and in individual souls. All this would show how much our Lord's thoughts were now turned to the reception and progress of the Gospel preaching, and our Lady's prayers would follow the thoughts of our Lord. Our Lord was all this time preparing to launch His Apostles on their active ministry, and the parables may be looked upon as a kind of preparation, both of them and of the people, for their exercise of that ministry. Thus our Blessed Lady would be led to give Him thanks and honour especially in the capacity in which He now displayed Himself, of the Teacher of the world by means of the Church.

She would understand, moreover, the twofold motive which may be assigned for His external conduct during this time. He avoided publicity, He passed into parts of the Holy Land where He was less known, outside the jurisdiction of Herod, and He even seems to have betaken Himself, at least in passing, to the heathen land of Phœnicia. His course was that of a man flying from persecution, and desirous, above all, of hiding Himself. His greatest miracles were wrought in desert places, or on the sea. The fear of a premature collision with the powers arrayed against Him was, no doubt, one

element which determined this course. Another was probably His desire to perfect His Apostles in that teaching concerning Himself which is so grandly expressed in the confession of faith made by St. Peter. This faith was absolutely requisite for the trials they were to go through, and the work which was to be committed to them, and the last stage of our Lord's Public Life, so different in many respects from its earlier stages, could not be entered upon until they were thus confirmed. We may suppose that our Lord would not have been so careful to keep out of the way of His enemies if He had completed the training of His Apostles in the faith at an earlier period. All this would suggest great matter for prayer and for sympathy with our Lord.

Another great field for the same holy exercises was thrown open by the mission of the Apostles to preach. In the first place we have the immense compassion of our Lord for the people, whose legitimate pastors, as far as any such existed, neglected them, and left them to themselves to listen to or reject our Lord's teaching, instead of doing their duty to lead them to Him. In the second place, it is impossible to consider our Lord's great charge to the Apostles without seeing that He did not limit Himself therein to the immediate occasion of His discourse, which was the short mission, lasting, perhaps, a few weeks, which was the work of the moment. He spoke to the Apostles as if He had before Him the whole body of Christian ministers of the Word of God in all time, and He laid down the laws and rules on which that great work must always

be conducted. He also warned them of the great dangers that were to be encountered, and of the immense protection they would receive from Him as well as of the magnificent reward. Thus the whole scheme and plan and future of the Christian preaching was before our Lord's mind, and we cannot doubt but that the same subject became at this time uppermost in the prayer of His Blessed Mother.

Another very great range, both of adoration and fervent thanksgiving, as also of most earnest intercession, was laid open by the great miracles of the loaves. Our Lord Himself made the first of these miracles the text, so to say, of the great discourse in the Synagogue of Capernaum on the Bread from Heaven. It seems reasonable to think that the miracle was wrought very mainly on account of the doctrine which was thus to be founded upon it. The great doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, the Adorable Sacrifice, and Holy Communion, belongs to that class of truths as to which we have supposed that they may have probably been to some extent communicated to our Blessed Lady in the long conferences at Nazareth during the Hidden Life. Now that this doctrine was set forth, though in a manner veiled and incomplete, by our Lord, it would actually become a subject of fervent prayer as well as of intense and adoring gratitude and praise on the part of our Blessed Lady. She would not only understand the infinite beauty and importance of the doctrine itself, and the great boon to mankind in time and in eternity which it involved. She would also see the difficulties which it would present, the scandal which it might give, the handle which it might afford to

cavillers, the opportunity of desertion which it would furnish to those already inclined to forsake our Lord. And if these were to be its immediate results on the men of that generation to whom our Lord Himself preached, the thoughtful soul of His Mother might well be able to forecast what would be the history of this great device of love in its reception in the world, both as to the faith with which it might be welcomed and the diligence with which it was to be used. In all this, again, the Blessed Mother would see fresh calls on her gratitude by our Lord, her joy at the bountifulness of His Love, her sorrow for the incredulity and unfaithfulness of men, her prayers that so great a blessing might not go unappreciated and without profit to the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

The manifestation of Himself which was made by our Lord in this great miracle, and considered as a foreshadowing of His condescension in the Blessed Sacrament, was in many respects new and more marvellous than any that had preceded it. It not only displays greater power and magnificence than are seen elsewhere, it also brings out our Lord's dealing with souls one by one, in the character under which we delight to speak of Him as their Spouse. For in the Blessed Sacrament He gives Himself wholly to each single person who receives Him, and this gift is but the consummation and crown of His whole dealing with us always as particular persons, not all together as a mass. In all this method of action our Lord displays the most wonderful knowledge, study, and care of every one, as if that one was all that He had to care for, and as He died for

each one in particular, so now He gives Himself in Communion to each one in particular. This great subject only belongs to us here inasmuch as it presents our Lord in this new light, which our Blessed Lady must have understood, and made the subject of infinite thanksgivings.

There were some others among the miracles of the period which must have touched our Blessed Lady deeply. Such would be the two miracles on the Lake, the stilling of the tempest, and the walking on the water, in each of which, as in the other miracles worked on the Lake, there was a deep significance and a prophetic meaning with reference to the fortunes of the Catholic Church, a meaning open to her illuminated mind more than to any others. She could understand why our Lord had let the storm increase to such a pitch, and yet remain Himself tranquilly sleeping, and why He let St. Peter come to Him on the water, and yet let his attempt prove to him his own weakness of faith and need of continual support. Such, again, would be the miracle on the daughter of the Syrophœnician woman, which our Lord at first refused once and again, in order to provoke and elicit the faith of that blessed suppliant, and then granted the request with a fulness of bounty and of praise to her which made her conspicuous even among those in whom His ever ready mercy showed itself in miraculous boons. Nor can we suppose that the heart of our Lady was indifferent to the treatment which our Lord received at the hands of the people of Nazareth on His last visit to the town where she had been born and lived, and where He had become Incarnate

and had been brought up. Especially would she thank Him interiorly for the few miracles which His compassion had drawn from Him, and which were so undeserved by the people in general.

The great Confession of St. Peter was fully understood by her in all its importance on the career of our Lord of which we shall presently have to speak. But in itself it was a magnificent victory, a triumph of faith which more than compensated to our Lord for the indifference of the multitude and the hostility of the ecclesiastical rulers. It implied a whole wonderful series of acts on the part of the Eternal Father, leading in His Providence this choice soul, and that of His companions in the Apostolate, step by step into the presence of the great truth which was at the same time His own greatest work, greater than all the rest of creation. Our Lord's Heart loved to dwell on this action of His Father's, and was most grateful for it. He spoke of it as the reason and ground for the peculiar blessedness of St. Peter. He had learnt the truth concerning the Person of our Lord, not from man, but from God. No one could know Him but the Father, and now the Father had accomplished the marvellous revelation in the hearts of these men, who, as He said afterwards, belonged to Him and were given by Him to His Incarnate Son, as the flower and glory of the human race whose nature He had taken. The Father had led them so far, and He was to lead them still further, step after step, to higher ranges of faith, and to wonderful achievements of charity founded upon faith. But humble and peaceful souls, when they hear of thanks being given because others

have received graces of which they have themselves being made partakers, are instinctively prompted to thanksgivings on their own account, as well as on account of those who are so spoken of, and the gratitude of our Lord's Heart for the faith to which the Father had led on the Apostles, must have awakened afresh a blaze of thanksgiving in the heart of His Mother for what she had herself received by the teaching and leading on of the Father.

We may pause here for a moment to observe how much these words of our Lord about the teaching of the Apostle by the Father confirm the high estimate, on which all these considerations are grounded, of the graces vouchsafed to our Lady. It seems as if it had been a most marvellous elevation of the Apostle, that he had reached, by the special guidance of the Father, the solid and perfect faith concerning the Divinity of our Lord. This seems to be the foundation of numberless graces and privileges which are to be lavished on St. Peter, and which are to fit him for the faithful exercise of one of the highest posts in the Christian Kingdom. We may well suppose that without this faith he would have been incapable of so high a trust, and that this faith, once deeply planted in the soul, even, as our Lord said, as a grain of mustard seed, would have opened to him the intelligence of all the treasures of truth. But we cannot doubt that the faith of Mary, from the very beginning, was of a brightness and solidity which could not be rivalled even by the faith of the Apostles, not only at the moment of their confession, but at any period of their lives. It is only reasonable, therefore, that we should con-

fidently believe the immense perfection both of her intelligence and of her love, which in truth, sets her so far above even the most exalted of the saints.

A further element of gratitude and rejoicing would be furnished to her by the great reward, conferred on and promised, to St. Peter. Our Lord's words brought before her mind all that she had learnt concerning the glorious edifice of the Christian Church which was to be founded on the Apostle, all the beauty and magnificence of her proportions, all the supreme efficacy of her powers entrusted to her for the salvation of souls and the glory of God. By the side of this vision, so to speak, would rise before her the assaults which the Church was to undergo, the conflict with the gates of Hell, which was to be the essential condition of her life in this world. The experience of our Lord's Life and treatment in the world, both before and after the time when He began to preach, was in itself enough to show any thoughtful and enlightened mind what would be the treatment of the Church when He left her behind Him to do the work which He had begun. He had come to His own, and His own had not received Him. The Church was to be sent to the whole hostile raging world, mad with passion and vice, and hounded on in its restless misery by all the power and malignity of Hell to devour her. Light had come into the world, and men had loved darkness rather than light, because of the wickedness of their deeds. The good physician, the healer of souls, the shepherd in search of the wandering sheep, the bearer of peace and refreshment and rest, had been treated as if He had been an enemy with poison in His hand, lies on

His lips, destruction in His Heart. They had called the Master of the house Beelzebub, and they were not likely to welcome with loving words and hearts those of the household. The kingdom of Satan was threatened, his goods were to be taken from Him as well as his armour. He would fight to the last with all his malice and all his power, hoping to return to the realm of which he was despoiled with sevenfold malice and cruelty. The Church was to be armed against him with no weapons but those which our Lord had used, and her Apostles were to go forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. How glorious was the simple promise—the gates of Hell shall not prevail against her!

The last words, also, of our Lord to St. Peter were full of significance to the heart of Mary, for they contained the most gracious of boons, the most characteristic fruits of the great condescension of the Incarnation which had been wrought in her womb. For it was a beautiful counsel, in perfect keeping with that great condescension, and issuing from it, that the Son of God becoming man should not only give to men the power to become the sons of God, but should strengthen and elevate them so greatly and so highly as to make them capable of being helping ministers, as St. Paul says, of the new dispensation, made capable, by God's grace, in their utter weakness and abasement, that to them should be committed the ministry of reconciliation, the power of binding and loosing, the legislative and judicial authority, so that there should be among them those who have the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and that what they bind and what they loose on

earth should be bound and loosed there. These words of our Lord may not have conveyed to the mind of the Apostles, when they were uttered, the whole fulness of meaning which they afterwards were seen to unfold. But we have supposed that the great plan of the application of the fruits of the Incarnation and Sacrifice of our Lord to mankind by means of the Church and her rulers and ministers was laid open, at least in great part, to our Blessed Lady, probably as early as the years of the Hidden Life. Thus it may have been her privilege to understand this promise to St. Peter, when it was made, in the fulness of import which it bore in our Lord's own Heart, as far as that was possible. If this was so, here was an occasion which she could not fail to use, of the most fervent adoration and thanksgiving, for the greatness of the blessing thus conferred on mankind, the most tender rejoicing over that accomplishment of the desires of our Lord's Heart for the good of His brethren which was involved in the promise now made, and the most burning intercession for the faithfulness of those who were the objects of so much bounty to the graces showered upon them.

To our Lord, and perhaps to His Mother also, this first free mention of the Church must have been an occasion of great delight. The Church was the dearest thing to His Heart, as the dearest person to His Heart was His Mother, and they could hardly be separated in the thoughts and affections of Jesus Christ. He would know, moreover, how large a part she was to have in the formation, the guidance, the protection of the Church, both during her life

and afterwards, and how the Church would be constantly acknowledging its debt of gratitude to her by the honour which, in so many different ways, it was to pay her, both in public and in the personal devotions of its children. This may have been one of the things which were not yet present, in all their fulness, to her most humble and simple soul, though her Canticle had contained words which cover the whole of the tribute which has been paid to her by all generations. The office which she had been discharging all through the Public Life of her Lord was in part the exercise of, in part the preparation for, her office towards the Church, which already existed in its members, its rulers, its foundation, though it was not, strictly speaking, born into the world as the living Bride of the Lamb until the moment of our Lord's Sacrifice. Our Lady was to be left on earth, as we are so often told, after the Ascension of our Lord, in order that she might perform what belonged to that office during the first few years of the infancy of the Church, as she had been the nursing Mother of our Lord Himself. Then she was to be transferred to her throne of glory in Heaven, there, as we also believe, to exercise with greater power, continuity, and intensity, the same motherly care of which we see so many traces in the Public Life. Thus the foundation of the Church was a joy to her, not only on account of the glory and satisfaction which it gave to our Lord, but also because a part of the glory and satisfaction was founded on the position which she was to hold in relation to it. The first and essential part in the training of the Twelve was now complete, and our

Lady must have understood the intense satisfaction and relief which the accomplishment of this part of His work brought to His Sacred Heart.

CHAPTER IX.

MARY DURING OUR LORD'S LAST PREACHING.

THE Confession of St. Peter brings us near indeed to the end of the Public Life. It is thought to have taken place seven or eight months before the Passion itself, a period of time such as has more than once occurred in the history of our Lord's Ministry without being marked by many momentous incidents. In the present case, however, the time was crowded with events on which the historians of our Lord dwell. If we consider the period of which we speak to end with the Day of Palms, which ushers in the great week of the Passion, we find that the earliest of our Lord's historians, St. Matthew and St. Mark, tell us but little about it, except what occurred quite at its beginning, and quite at its end. But the time left thus by them without chronicle is very largely filled both by St. Luke and by St. John, each of whom makes here large additions to the history, independently of the other. About a third of the whole Gospel of St. Luke is devoted to this time, and nearly as large a portion of the Gospel of St. John. As St. John avoids mentioning what St. Luke has already touched, we have thus a large part of the whole Gospel narrative belonging to this

period. But it is easily broken up into a few large divisions, a recapitulation of which will enable us to grasp easily the chief features of the narrative.

The most remarkable and important point for notice is the great change of method and manner in our Lord after the Confession of St. Peter. It is as if He had been set free from a great weight which had before restrained both His words and His actions. He now begins to speak at once of the approach of His Passion, warning the disciples of it most earnestly, and sternly rebuking St. Peter, whom He had just raised so high by His promise, for speaking to Him words in which He deprecated what our Lord had announced. This warning of the coming Passion, which increases in detail as time goes on, is repeated many times over before the actual time when the prediction was fulfilled. The disciples were scarcely able to understand what our Lord then said. The only heart that could take it in was the heart which was to suffer the most, next to His own. In the next place, our Lord not only spoke of His own Passion, but insisted, now for the first time, on the doctrine of the necessity of the Cross for those who were to follow Him. He had once before mentioned the Cross.¹ Except on that one occasion, it had been kept in His own Heart, like the name of the Church. We do not know whether we have a right to think that the proverbial words about taking up the Cross and following Him, which are so easy of understanding to Christians, would convey to the Jews of that day any idea like that which they convey to us. If it was not so, then

¹ St. Matt. x. 38.

on that former occasion our Lord allowed Himself the use of words familiar to His own Heart, but which would not at once interpret themselves to His hearers. And now, again, He used the same words freely. He added, moreover, some cogent reasons why men should not shrink back from the Cross, and He crowned His words by a promise that there were some there present who, before they died, should see the Kingdom of God in power.²

A week later, the promise was fulfilled by the great marvel of the Transfiguration, in which Moses and Elias were seen with Him in glory, by St. Peter, St. James, and St. John. The whole mystery was a manifestation of the Blessed Trinity, and stands at the beginning of this the last period of our Lord's teaching, as the mystery of the Baptism stands at the outset of the first. The Baptism secured to us the adoption or sonship to God which we receive in our baptism, and the Transfiguration completes that sonship by prefiguring and promising what St. Paul calls the "adoption of the sons of God, the redemption of our body."³ After this comes the miracle on the lunatic demoniac, whom the Apostles left behind at the foot of the mountain of the Transfiguration had not been able to deliver, and then our Lord goes to Capharnaum, where He pays the tribute for the Temple by the stater found in the fish's mouth, and delivers some very important instruction to the Apostles about humility, the danger of scandal, the duty of fraternal correction and of mutual forgiveness of debts and injuries.

² *Story of the Gospels*, § 82.

³ Romans viii. 23.

There is no further teaching at Capharnaum recorded at this time.⁴

The next event is the presence of our Lord at the feast of Tabernacles in the September of the year before His Passion. This is given at great length by St. John, who makes it his business all through to record what the other Evangelists had left untouched, being chiefly what had happened at or near Jerusalem. This contribution of St. John to the general history extends from the beginning of his seventh chapter to the middle of the tenth. It embraces the accounts of the disputations in the Temple at that feast, the history of the woman taken in adultery and the man born blind, and our Lord's teaching concerning Himself as the Shepherd of the sheep. St. John afterwards gives us an account of the attempt of the Jews to stone our Lord at the feast of the Dedication, and then the history of the raising of Lazarus, the Council against our Lord, at which Caiphas prophesied, and the supper at Bethany.⁵

Into the midst of this long portion of St. John's Gospel we must insert the much longer portion of the Gospel of St. Luke which begins in the ninth chapter and ends in the seventeenth. Except in the case of one or two incidents, the scene of all that is here told must be laid in Judæa. We have thus a long narrative of the teaching of our Lord at this period, not in Jerusalem itself, but in the cities, towns, and villages of Judæa, which He now passed through as He had been wont to pass through before

⁴ *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 83—88.

⁵ *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 89—96, and 119—121.

the cities, towns, and villages of Galilee.⁶ After this, we find St. Luke rejoining the narrative of the first two Gospels in an account of our Lord's teaching in Peræa, a part of the country which He had not before visited.⁷ The teaching which is recorded as being delivered here is in the main concerned with what we call the counsels of perfection. But we need not suppose that our Lord actually confined Himself to such teaching when in this part of the country. It was the last part of the Holy Land to be visited by Him, and it was therefore natural that He should there put forward, for His disciples, certain doctrines which supposed in them a more advanced state of spiritual cultivation. The Evangelists relate this because it had not been related before. After this, we have little distinctive to mention concerning our Lord's teaching before His arrival at Bethany just before Palm Sunday.

This short sketch of the whole period enables us to see what were its chief characteristics. Our Lord no longer holds back the great truth of His approaching death at the hands of the Jews. He preaches plainly the doctrine of the Cross. He lays down to His disciples the principles of Evangelical perfection, especially on the great subjects of humility, forgiveness, chastity, poverty, and obedience. There were also at this time several most significant parables, bearing on the principles of the Kingdom He was to found. Besides this, He passes out of Galilee, teaches publicly, as He had never before done, as far as we know, in the Temple, and dis-

⁶ *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 97—118.

⁷ *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 122—131.

putes openly and firmly with the Jewish authorities, whom He reproaches with intending to kill Him on account of the miracle He had wrought, at His last visit to Jerusalem, on the impotent man on the Sabbath Day. They send officers to seize Him, but the officers return to tell them that no man ever spoke like He. Among themselves even, there is angry disputing concerning Him. He returns to the Temple once and again, until they have taken up stones to put Him to death. His whole demeanour is one, if not of defiance, at least of the most absolute independence and fearlessness. Who indeed, and what were they, before Him? All the time He is reasoning with them, and doing many things to win them, though they have excommunicated the man born blind, whom He had healed, for saying that He was a prophet, and determined to excommunicate any who asserted Him to be the Christ.

This period, however, has another aspect, inasmuch as it is the only time of which we have any record when He preached in His usual laborious manner in the country of Judæa, properly so called. That He did so, was a proof that He no longer thought it worth His while to hold Himself back, for fear of irritating the priests and scribes at Jerusalem. His preaching was in some respects more aggressive and public, as He sent the seventy-two disciples before His face, two and two, into all the cities and towns where He was coming. In truth, He had but a short time for this last missionary course, on which, however, He could not have spent the whole of the months embraced in the interval between the

feast of Tabernacles and the Passion. It was inevitable that in many respects His teaching now should be identical with that which He had delivered in the earlier years of His Ministry, when He had gone through Galilee in the same way as He now went through Judæa. Not only was the teaching in great measure identical, as must always be the case when the great truths are preached by the same missionaries in various places successively, but the reception with which He met was, in an equal degree, identical in the two provinces. That it should be so was involved in the identity of human nature itself in His various audiences.

All this, on which we must not linger, is drawn out fully elsewhere, as well as the other truth which may, nevertheless, be referred to here, of the singular tenderness and compassionateness both of the teaching and the demeanour of our Lord in this latter instance of His exercise of the Evangelical Ministry. It seems as if He allowed Himself to manifest a deeper and more pitying affectionateness as the time of His great Sacrifice drew nigh. He was now pre-eminently the Good Shepherd Who was to lay down His life for the sheep, regarding them, therefore, not merely as His sheep, but as the sheep which He loved at so great a cost to Himself. The manifestations of this tenderness begin quite early in this period, as in the case of the woman taken in adultery, and our Lord's gentle words to the man born blind, after his excommunication. We see it in His teaching about the shepherd and the sheep. As we pass to St. Luke from St. John, we find the same all through the long chapters which contain

the narrative of the third Evangelist, where it shows itself in His words about the Samaritans who would not receive Him, in the parable about the Good Samaritan, in the defence of Mary against the censure of Martha, and especially in the Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Groat, and the Prodigal Son. But this is not the place for a complete treatment of this beautiful subject. This characteristic of this later preaching of our Lord is mentioned here, because it must have been fully understood and appreciated by our Blessed Lady.

The recorded miracles of this time are very few, but it is certain that those which are specially mentioned are so mentioned, in each case, for some reason which applies to them and not to others, and also that the whole of our Lord's course through Judæa was lighted up by a continual chain of what we may call, for the sake of distinction, His ordinary miracles of healing, countless in number. The miracles on the man born blind, on the dropsical man, on the woman whom our Lord called a daughter of Abraham, on the deaf and dumb demoniac, and on the ten lepers, have each a special cause for mention in the narrative. Still more clearly was this the case with the great miracle of the raising of Lazarus, which was the immediate occasion of the final determination of Caiphas and his associates to put our Lord to death. The miracle on the blind men at Jericho is the last that is recorded at this time.

We are quite unable to say whether, when our Lord changed the scene of His preaching from Galilee to Judæa, our Lady made any corresponding

change in her place of abode. It seems likely that in the course of these months He made one visit, if not more, to Galilee, where she may have remained till near their close. All that is important for us is to consider how far the change in His teaching, especially as to the doctrine of the Passion and the Cross, affected the heart of His Blessed Mother. We need not doubt that Mary was perfectly familiar with the pre-ordained issue of our Lord's Ministry. The future Passion had been announced to her very plainly by the holy Simeon as early as the time of her Purification. If that had not been so, it would not have been possible for one so pre-eminent in her intelligence of the prophecies and of the types of the Law and of the history of the holy nation, to be ignorant of what was at hand, though the words of Simeon may have been the first intimation given to her that she was herself to have so large a share in the Cross. As we look back on the history in the light of the Christian revelation, we can see that the Divine plan of the Incarnation, whatever it might have been if the Fall had never taken place, would have been, after the Fall and the consequent necessity of redemption, incomplete and maimed without the Passion. So again, with the whole of our Lord's Life, from the first sufferings in the crib. Those first sufferings presage the Passion. It is therefore hard to think that the declarations of our Lord on this point revealed anything new to our Lady, and it is here that we can see the immense difference between her perfect intelligence and sympathy with our Lord and the comparative dulness and coldness of the disciples. The thought of the Passion, like

the thought of the Church, was never out of her heart, while each was a thought which to their minds was not only unfamiliar, but very difficult to grasp.

This would not make it less of a blow or a stab to her tender heart when the Passion was openly predicted and described by our Blessed Lord. His words would only intensify the unchangeable pangs of her heart, in which nothing ever lost its freshness, nothing whether of joy or grief was ever deadened by familiarity. It would be to her as if she had never heard of it before, as it was when she came to witness it on Mount Calvary. Her foreknowledge of it was not given her that she should suffer the less, but that she might sympathize and might pray the more, and that her soul might ever advance in grace by the use of this means also. It is very often the case, in the Providential guidance of our lives, that the sorrows of the future are mercifully veiled from us. But it is also often the case that we are kept a long time in the expectation, and even in the certain anticipation, of coming sorrows, and when God deals with us in this latter way, it is very likely that the mercy may be still more tender than when He hides from us what is to be. For the anticipation of a grief, lovingly and humbly borne by the soul, is a great opportunity for the exercise of many beautiful virtues, in the same way as the hope or the desire of some boon which God may be about to give us makes us more fervent in prayer and raises us immensely above earthly trifles. The declarations of our Lord, then, concerning His Passion, not only showed that it was nigh at hand, but were also calls

upon the renewed devotion and intercession of His Mother. And, although to the disciples the ever increasing minuteness of the details of the prediction may have been to a great extent lost by the dulness of those to whom they were made, they might still furnish to a heart like that of Mary great subjects for contemplation, and for the exercise of all the loving affections which the consideration of such details is calculated to produce.

Again, the preaching of the Cross must have been a great occasion of joy to our Lady, as it was to our Lord. He said of His Passion, how was He straitened till it was accomplished! and one of the main elements in the fire which He came on earth to kindle by His Sacrifice, must have been the working of the love of the Cross in hearts that would catch that love from Him. This was a part of what He may have meant when He said, that when He was lifted up from the earth He would draw all things to Himself.⁸ And it is most certainly true that it is the doctrine of the Cross which has wrought in the world all the great achievements of Christian heroism. Its appearance, therefore, in its proper place in the teaching of our Lord, which now became possible, must have been a cause of immense exultation to the heart of His Mother, while, at the same time, it would bring Him more clearly before her mind in the special characters of Redeemer, Saviour, Sacrifice, and it would impose on her a great enterprise of prayer, on account of the immense glories which depended on the correspondence of men to this great doctrine, and of the enor-

⁸ St. John xii. 32.

mous difficulties and hindrances which stood in the way of that correspondence. And our Lady would rejoice over all the truths with which our Lord urged and fortified this doctrine, and especially by the promise which He held out that some should see the Kingdom of Heaven in power, and which He fulfilled so much sooner than might have been expected in the vision of the Transfiguration. This promise of itself would represent to her nothing vague or indistinct, for she must have understood from our Lord long before this what were to be the gifts and glories of His Body in His Kingdom, and, derived from that, what were to be the gifts and glories of the bodies of His saints.

Some contemplatives think that our Lady may have been enabled, in some marvellous manner, to witness the Transfiguration. This must be left uncertain. This would in any case be a circumstance which would not be inserted in any of the Gospel narratives, which are silent as to all such special privileges of the Blessed Mother. She was to witness and, indeed, to share the Passion in a manner more perfect than any of the three Apostles, and there could not be in her any of the dulness of faith which may have been a reason why the vision was not extended to the other nine. The revelations of the Transfiguration would have been understood and appreciated by her better than any one else, and so would have been greater profit to her soul. On the other hand, it is certain that her faith did not want the confirmation which was conveyed to that of the Apostles by that wonderful vision, and that this may have been an occasion on which these

words of our Lord were true of her, that they were blessed who had not seen and yet had believed. If the vision were not vouchsafed to her, it would have been so for some reason of this kind, not because our Lord's love could deny to her anything that He allowed to any of the saints.

Our Lady must have felt about the transfer of the scene of our Lord's teaching to Judæa, as she felt about the prediction of the Passion itself. For it was a step onwards towards the accomplishment of the Passion. It was presenting Himself to His enemies in all their power, in the seat of their authority, and provoking them thereby. For if their hostility to Him was caused by their evil lives, their jealousy of His influence, their political fears, and the like, all the motives of this sort which had before animated them, would only be stirred up and stimulated to activity by the steps which He was now taking. But she would understand His desire for the accomplishment of His work, she would share His courage, His zeal for souls, and for the glory of the Father, even His longing for the Passion, and, at the same time, His tender compassion for all that the name of Jerusalem represented to His Heart, as well as the burning love of the Shepherd of souls, which made Him unable to restrain Himself from the missionary labours in the hills and plains of Judæa, which He had put off till now. She would enter most tenderly into the spirit of the teaching of this period. To His disciples He was now full of the most delicate care for the dangers which might hinder their perfection, such as ambition, party spirit, love of pre-eminence, neglect of

occasions of scandal, indulgence in an unforgiving and censorious temper, blindness to the value of fraternal correction, whether in the giving or in the receiving, or, again, ignorance of the great Evangelical principles and their immense value, in the matters of chastity, poverty, humility, and obedience. The importance of all this part of our Lord's teaching would be more readily understood by her than by all others, and she would see in it the laying of the foundation of most wonderful perfection to be achieved hereafter by His grace, in the Church. Indeed, it is at this period that He especially manifested Himself as the Legislator of the New Kingdom in a way somewhat different from that which we discern in the Sermon on the Mount, the doctrine of which, as in the case of divorce, is frequently carried on and made complete at the time. And, again, in all this teaching she would read the reflection of His own most perfectly beautiful character, the delight of Heaven and earth, and pray for the production in human souls of something that might correspond to that beauty. And every word and action of this time in which, as has been said, that increase of tenderness and compassion which belonged to it was revealed, would not be lost on the heart of Mary.

The great miracle of the raising of Lazarus would be another feature of this period which would speak to her more than to others. When our Lord heard of the illness of His friend from the messengers of Martha and Mary, He was in retirement near the desert, soon after the attempt had been made to stone Him in Jerusalem. When He pro-

posed to go again to the neighbourhood of that city, for the purpose of helping Lazarus, it was opposed by the Apostles, and the loving Thomas cried out to his brethren, "Let us also go, that we also may die with Him!"⁹ Thomas probably thought that his Master would be immediately seized and put to death. But his fears would perhaps have vanished after the great miracle itself, which, he might have supposed, would either convert or intimidate the Chief Priests, and would at all events prove that our Lord possessed any power that might be required to shield Him from their machinations. Our Blessed Lady, more familiar with our Lord's Heart than any of the Apostles, might see in the same miracle, not only a manifestation of Divine power even greater than any which He had already shown, but also the final blow which would drive the malignity of His enemies to the most extreme measures, and thus hasten on the catastrophe. As a matter of history, it was the raising of Lazarus which was the determining cause of the policy adopted by Caiphas. His course had all the extreme folly of human pride and passion, but it had also all the malignity of Satan to prompt it. But human passion and diabolical fury were in this instance to be used by God to bring about His own most beneficent purpose for the redemption of the human race and the destruction of the power of Satan. All this marvellous counsel of God would be known to our Blessed Lady, and the thoughts and affections which it moved in her would be of the utmost admiration and gratitude, as well as of the deepest sorrow for

⁹ St. John xi. 16.

the sin into which the whole of the holy nation was being dragged by its rulers.

The only remaining feature of this period of which we need speak with regard to our Blessed Lady, is the teaching in *Peræa*, which seems to have occupied a part, at least, of the time between the resuscitation of Lazarus and the arrival of our Lord at Bethany before Palm Sunday. As has been said, the teaching, as it is preserved to us by the three earlier Evangelists, must in the main have been addressed to the disciples, although the incidents which suggested it were independent of them. It was in consequence of a question put to Him by the Pharisees about divorce, that our Lord promulgated, not only the Christian law of marriage in its full perfection, but also the counsel of chastity. It was the attempt of some to hinder the little children being brought freely to Him, that made Him speak then of the need of humility. The rich young man who came to ask Him what he must do to inherit eternal life, and who then pressed still further for something beyond the observance of the Commandments, gave our Lord the opportunity of laying down the counsel of Evangelical poverty. The question of St. Peter about the reward of those who had left all things and followed Him, furnished the text for His great promise of the hundred-fold in this life, and of the judicial authority in the next, and this again led on to the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, so full of deep instruction for all who are called to perfection. The petition of the sons of Zebedee may also be mentioned, as having drawn from our Lord His great counsel of humility

and subjection. In all this teaching we can see how much there would be which would not be fully understood, even by the Apostles, at the time, and we can see also how faithfully our Lady's Heart would have followed it, and how completely she would have understood it and rendered to Him thanks and praise for it.

No period of our Lord's teaching is more instructive than this as to the manifestation of His character and office, for the reason that we find Him speaking and acting more plainly and with less reserve, and also because there are as many as three or four different strains of His doctrine, as it were, crossing each other at this time. He was not the same in His teaching to the Apostles and disciples in private, as at Capharnaum before the feast of Tabernacles, and as in Peræa at the very end of these months of ministry, and in His discussions with the priests in the Temple at Jerusalem, of which we have so considerable a record in several chapters of St. John, which relate what passed at that feast, and also, much later, at the feast of the Dedication. Again, there is a difference between the teaching at Capharnaum and that in Peræa, where He is more distinctly setting forth great principles on which Evangelical perfection was to be built up. And in the more ordinary teaching to the people in the country parts of Judæa, He is different again, although we have here so many repetitions of what had been before taught in the Galilæan Ministry. The warnings against hypocrisy, against covetousness and worldliness, the strict injunctions on watchfulness, and the whole series of

parables like that of the Good Samaritan and the Lost Sheep, give to this time a character of its own. There had been very few occasions on which He had even spoken as He did in the disputation in the Temple with the priests which St. John has recorded. He reveals Himself as God, as Judge, as Rewarder, as Light and Life, as the Hearer of prayer, and the Redeemer by laying down His life for the sheep, as well as in the merciful character of the Good Samaritan, or in that of the Teacher of Perfection. Our Lady's office by His side in her discernment of His relations to us, or of the features and outlines of the new Kingdom, must have given full occupation to her heart, while at every step she must have found fresh opportunities of prayer and intercession. He was evidently hastening on His course, yearning for its consummation and for the kindling of the fire which He came to send on earth, and at the same time giving the reins to His love, His tenderness, His compassion, His grief for the loss of souls.

It is difficult to imagine a more beautiful summing up of this whole time than that which is to be found in the scene with which it closes. At the supper at Bethany we have our Lord full of the thought of His own death. The loving sisters, Martha and Mary, are there, full of devotion and gratitude for the great miracle which he had wrought for them in giving them back their brother from the grave on the fourth day after his death. Whether Mary Magdalene divined anything of the coming Passion is not easy for us to guess. She must have been an attentive gatherer up of the words of her beloved Master, and so may perhaps have seen more clearly

than others into His meaning when He had so often repeated the warning about the Cross. She was familiar, too, with the character of the men who were leagued against Him, and besides all this, she must by this time have become a constant companion and intimate disciple of the Blessed Mother. So it may not be quite certain that when our Lord, in His defence of her, spoke of her having done what she had done in lavishing her ointment on Him, in consideration of His approaching death, intended by that that she had some presentiment of its nearness. Lazarus is there, marked out by the hatred of the Jews for death, because our Lord had restored him to life. The whole scene is full of the unexpressed anticipation of something great which is about to happen, something mournful and solemn. The croak of envy and censoriousness is heard in the criticism of Judas, veiling his selfishness and covetousness and rancour under the pretext of piety, moderation, and zeal for good. If, as is probable, our Blessed Lady was herself present, or, at least, in the house, she must have heard or seen in the whole a great revelation of our Lord, and a great invitation to prayer. The character of triumph and joy, mixed with the presage of sorrow, belongs to this scene in the house at Bethany, as well as to that which followed on the next day, on the Procession of Palms and the royal entrance into Jerusalem.



BOOK IV.

MARY DURING THE PASSION.



CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST DAYS OF HOLY WEEK.

WE have already supposed that our Blessed Lady was at Bethany at the time of the supper at which Magdalene anointed our Lord for the second time, and was so lovingly defended by Him against the criticisms set on foot by the malice and disappointment of Judas. We may consider that the house of Martha and Mary was a home to our Lady at such times as these. As she reappears in the history of the Evangelists at the Passion, it must be considered that we have their authority for concluding that she was at Jerusalem at least a few days before that time. She had an office to discharge to our Lord by her presence at His great Sacrifice at the cost of unparalleled suffering to her and to Him also. The sight of His sufferings was a crucifixion to her, and the sight of her sufferings was a fresh crucifixion to Him. This does not exhaust the Divine reasons for her presence. Unless her sufferings with our Lord had been determined for some great purpose of God, we might suppose that, like St. Joseph, she might in mercy have been taken away before the time came for this extreme infliction, both on Him and on her. Thus we are justified by this also in expecting to find that the Passion was to set a crown on the

merits and the dignity of Mary in the Kingdom, which she had not before attained.

The Evangelists relate, at considerable length, the incidents of the first days of the Holy Week which had now begun. There is a characteristic colour about the whole of our Lord's demeanour in this time, which we have not seen so prominent in earlier parts of His course. He acts throughout as the King. The week begins with the solemn procession of the Palms, in which two several crowds combined to pay Him royal honours, the great company of the disciples who had come from Galilee, and the crowd of inhabitants or sojourners in Jerusalem. These were full of holy enthusiasm, first for the wonders which He had worked in their own region of Judæa during His late preaching there, but chiefly on account of the great spur which their devotion had lately received in the resuscitation of Lazarus. This stupendous miracle had never been surpassed by any that our Lord had wrought, and the circumstances of time and place under which it had occurred made it an event which influenced, in an unexampled way, both the enemies and the friends of our Lord. It was that miracle which made Caiphas and his associates in the priesthood determine to bring about our Lord's murder in their own way, and it was this miracle also which roused the enthusiasm of the people as shown on the day of Palms.¹

It would not have been difficult for our Lord to avoid the public display which was being prepared for Him, as He had more than once avoided other

¹ *Story of the Gospels*, § 132.

displays whether of honour or hostility to Himself. But it is clear that on this occasion He did not wish to do this. Rather, He brought it about and took a part in preparing it, when He sent His disciples to the village opposite Bethany to fetch the humble animals, on one of which He was to ride in this triumphant entry into the Holy City. The prophecies were to be fulfilled, and this was a motive for the action of our Lord. But in this, as in other cases, if the thing was done, when it was done, for the sake of the fulfilment of the prophecies, it was prophesied when it was prophesied because it was determined in the counsels of God that it should be done, and the reasons for that determination were hidden in the wisdom and choice of God. It is clear that our Lord now acted as the King, the Son of David, and that the prophecies which spoke of this mystery of the triumph of Palm Sunday, spoke of Him in that character. This entry on the Sunday gives the keynote to the whole of the week which ensued, and when we shall have followed Him all through its wonderful history, we shall find ourselves still looking up to Him as He hangs on the Cross, with the title over His head which Pilate refused to alter at the entreaty of the High Priests, the title which declared Him to be the King of the Jews.

Pilate, indeed would have stultified himself if he had altered the title. It is most certain that our Lord was accused of having made Himself King. This was not the charge on which He had been condemned by the Sanhedrin, but it was the charge on which He was accused to the judge on whose

decision His release or execution depended. It was the charge which the Chief Priests used with fatal effect when the Governor wavered, and proposed to let our Lord go. "Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar." The confession that He was a King is what St. Paul calls the good confession which our Lord made before Pilate. Thus He bore Himself in the Passion itself as He had borne Himself on the Sunday of Palms, and all through the intervening days we shall see that He preserved this character, and showed Himself indeed a King.

Thus when the Pharisees bade Him rebuke His disciples on the day of the procession, He replied that if they were to hold their peace, the stones would cry out. It was late, as it seems, when He reached the Temple, and that evening He did nothing but look round as a master in the house, heal a few sick persons, and then take His leave. But He would not rebuke the children who called on Him as the Son of David, and He quoted the Psalms to explain the Providential order of what was going on. At this time, moreover, it was that He cursed the barren fig-tree, as a type of the unfruitfulness of the nation whom He had come to save. And there is no other single miracle recorded of Him during the whole week, from Palm Sunday to the time when He healed the ear of Malchus. There is the same royal manner about the casting out of the buyers and sellers from the Temple. And it is to be noted that He acted with a greater show of authority on this occasion than on that of the former cleansing of the Temple, and that He spoke

of the house as His own, whereas on the other occasion He had spoken of the house of His Father. There is the same kingly authority about His answer to the chief priests when they asked Him His right to do what He was doing, referring them to the divinely ordained evidence of St. John Baptist, and refusing any other answer till they had satisfied Him as to the authority of His Precursor. The parables which He delivered to them at this time have all the same stamp, the two sons, the wicked husbandmen, followed by His teaching about the stone which the builders had rejected, and the wedding of the King's son. The character in which He was speaking throws light on His answer about giving tribute to Cæsar, as also on that given to the Sadducees, and on His own question to them about Christ being the Son of David. And there is the same supreme authority about the denunciation which he uttered to the people concerning the Scribes and Pharisees themselves. Out of reverence for their priestly functions He does not openly speak of them, either now or at any other time, as priests, but all who heard Him must have been aware that the persons of whom He was speaking were the very highest in ecclesiastical authority in the holy nation.²

The same strain of majesty and power is continued all through the remainder of our Lord's utterances and acts up to the very eve of the Passion. The Evangelists record for us, with considerable minuteness of detail, the last great teaching of our Lord on the Mount of Olives after He had taken His final leave of the Temple. It is then that

² *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 134—141.

He unrolled before them the great series of signs which were to go before, first the destruction of Jerusalem and then the end of the world, so far more distant than they could have thought. It is no bright picture that he sets before them, but one of persecution, and trial, and danger, and possible seduction even of the elect. Great as is the inherent power and majesty of the kingdom which they were to found, there is no prediction of universal dominion or peaceful possession of empire. The external conditions under which the Church was to fight her way through the world were wars and strifes, the conflict of nationalities, betrayals, apostacies, the appearance of false Christs and false prophets, while, as the awful day drew near, the constitution of nature itself was to be disturbed, the powers of the heavens were to be shaken, there were to be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars, earthquakes, pestilences, and famines, physical commotions and disturbances which of themselves would reduce men to the extreme of consternation and alarm. The Gospel was to be preached everywhere as a witness, and then the consummation was to come. And notwithstanding all the signs and terrors which were to precede the great day, the day itself was to steal on the inhabitants of the earth unawares, as a thief in the night, and to find them eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, as it had been in the days of Noe, up to the very day when he entered into the ark. And these great instructions finally close with the parables of the wise and foolish virgins, and of the talents, and with the description of the Judgment Day, when the King Himself shall

give His final and irrevocable sentence of eternal joys or eternal woes.³

These utterances of our Lord, including His answers to the questions put to Him by the Chief Priests and Scribes, by the Sadducees and the representative of the Pharisees, with which they begin, seem to have occupied the whole time of at least two days. The prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the end of the world, were delivered on Mount Olivet, either on the Tuesday or the Wednesday of the Holy Week. Our Lord spent the nights of these days at Bethany, unless indeed they were spent, like the night before the Passion itself, in prayer on the mountain side. There seems to have been a pause in His teaching on the Wednesday, if we follow some authorities, and He left Bethany finally in the course of the Thursday, in time to reach the Supper chamber before the hour when the Paschal Supper was to be begun. The place itself had been kept a secret by our Lord till the last moment, as, if it had been known to Judas, he might have betrayed it to the priests, to whom he had already promised His betrayal, and who might perhaps have thought it easier to seize our Lord in a house than in the Garden at midnight. By sending Peter and John to make their preparations in a place they did not know beforehand, and which they were to learn only at the moment, our Lord secured the quiet hours which He intended to spend in so many wonderful mysteries of love and mercy. He thus indeed fulfilled the saying of the ruler of the feast at the marriage of Cana, who said

3 *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 144—148.

to the bridegroom that he had kept his best to the last.

The kingly characteristic displays itself in various exercises of power, whether of beneficence and reward, or of condemnation and chastisement. In the days of which we are now speaking, our Lord shows the judicial side of His royalty most conspicuously. He passed sentence on Jerusalem at the same time that He wept over it. He cleansed the Temple as the Judge. His parables to the Chief Priests are so many solemn sentences on them. The single miracle of these days, after Palm Sunday, is the figure of the judicial blasting of the Synagogue on account of its unfruitfulness. His denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees has the same character, and it ends with the prediction that on them was to come the vengeance for all the just blood that hath been shed upon the earth, from the blood of Abel the Just to the blood of Zacharias the son of Barachias. Their house is to be left to them desolate. It is needless to point out the judicial tone of the prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the end of the world, and of the parables by which that last teaching on the Mount of Olives is concluded.

If the friends of our Lord had been disposed to judge only by human standards, they may perhaps have thought that this tone of majesty and authority now assumed by Him was a prelude to some great display of authoritative power in the open establishment of His Kingdom. It was evident that He did not fear His enemies, that He no longer avoided exposing Himself to their malice, that He did not

spare them in His words, or think it worth while to propitiate them. The time had evidently come when the issue must be decided by a victory on His part, or by a victory on theirs. They had determined that any one who professed his faith in Him was to be excommunicated ; He had denounced them in the strongest language. But He had done still more, for His entrance into the city on Palm Sunday was an overt act, in which He had proclaimed Himself King by accepting the homage which was offered to Him as such. He had done this without giving an account of His authority to them. This was a first blow, and it had been outwardly successful. When He left the Temple on the Tuesday or the Wednesday, He had silenced all His questioners and adversaries, and He stood higher than ever in His influence with the people. We have but to go back to His appearance in the Temple at the feast of Tabernacles, not many months before this time, and compare the treatment He received then, and that which He received now, to see that His followers might almost have thought that His enemies were quelled, or at least reduced to silence and inactivity. It needed a heart deeply familiar with the ways of God, and with the character of our Lord's mission and work, to see that the world and Satan must be but gathering themselves for a last and deadly effort to crush Him at all hazards, that the magnificent victory which He was immediately to gain was to be the victory of suffering and sacrifice, humiliation and expiation, and that the enemies of mankind were to be utterly defeated by being allowed an external triumph

surpassing all their hopes and satisfying all their malignity.

Our Blessed Lady must have been too familiar with the designs and intentions of our Lord to share in any delusions which others might entertain as to the issue of His presence at Jerusalem on this feast. The repeated predictions of the Passion may have been lost even on the Apostles, but they could not have been lost on her. She could not be deceived by the popularity of our Lord with the fickle multitude, nor could she have been lulled into security by any false hopes about the forbearance of the rulers after the Day of Palms. She could understand that our Lord's demeanour to them was that of one ready to be sacrificed to their fury, not of one who thought that that fury was disarmed. His acts and language of authority, the manner in which He passed sentence on them, one after another, warned the people against them, and predicted the national punishment of the crime which they were meditating, were understood by her as presaging indeed His great victory, but as showing also what that victory was, and how it was to be accomplished. Beneath the strain of royal judgment and sentence, she could hear that other strain, which now and then dominated, but was always present, of intense compassion and love of souls, the love of the Shepherd Who was about to lay down His Life for the sheep.

All the men who were the objects of His denunciations were the objects of her prayers. A little time was left to them, and then their opportunity would come, and could anything be done to hinder

them from availing themselves of it? Uppermost in the Heart of Mary during this week may have been the poor soul whose name does not occur, after the account of the Supper at Bethany, until we come to the very threshold of the Passion, the traitor Judas. The history of the soul of Judas during those days, if we could have it laid bare before us, would be the saddest record of the kind in the world. We are told by the Christian writers, and, indeed, it is hinted sufficiently in the Gospels themselves, that Judas had long been restless and uneasy in that holy company, and, indeed, no one could be otherwise, whose heart was in any way disloyal to our Lord. There are suggestions as to the manner in which he had been enrolled in that holy number of the Apostles, and as to the beginnings and increase of his evil tendencies, on which we need not dwell. We can hardly think that when he was called to be an Apostle he was less fit for that post, as he then was before God, than the rest of the band, and we may content ourselves with the simple account given of him by those writers who see in his case the history of an evil passion whose first slight manifestations are not checked, and which gradually poisons the whole soul. But we may be sure that he was the object of the keenest anxiety and tenderest devices of love on the part of our Lord, while our Blessed Lady's wonderful insight into characters and hearts could hardly fail to notice his declension, even before the time came when he revealed himself, as he did in the criticism on Magdalene. We are told by some that she lavished on him the most affectionate manifestations

as well as her most burning prayers, while such was the hardness and obstinacy of his heart, that all these only made him more determined and malignant. Our Lord knew all that passed between him and the Chief Priests, though it may have been hidden, in mercy, from our Lady, who must have seen all the danger to himself as well as to his Master which was involved even in his possible disloyalty.

We ought not to pass without mention the occasions which were furnished to our Blessed Lady of the most devout and adoring contemplations of the ways and decrees of God in the government of the world, by the last predictions and parables delivered by our Lord in the Temple and on the Mount of Olives. The first parables put before us at once the extreme patience with which God deals, whether with nations or with individual souls, and at the same time, the measures of His justice in withdrawing graces which are not appreciated and vocations to which no correspondence is made. The Jews themselves seem to have seen through the veil of the parabolic language, and when the chastisement of the wicked husbandmen was mentioned by our Lord, they broke out into the exclamation, "God forbid!"⁴ The sketch which is given in the prophecy about Jerusalem of the signs which were to precede that great act of vindictive justice, the national insurrection, the profanation of the holy place by the Roman abominations, and the like, open out a large field of considerations which help to the interpretation of other passages of history as well as of that.

⁴ St. Luke xx. 16.

The doctrine of the shortening of the days of trial and tribulation for the sake of the elect, the injunction of prayer against special and particular dangers involved in the general catastrophe, are also full of warning and of consolation. So also are the many features into which we cannot now enter, which occur in the predictions concerning the approach of the great day of account.

Our Blessed Lady might have recognized in the series of these predictions something more than was contained in them singly. For it was now that our Blessed Lord took upon Him, at least most formally and directly, the office of Prophet which belonged to Him as the Messias. He was Himself the great subject of prophecy under the older dispensation, and all the predictions and types centred in Him. But the gift of prophecy, in its most technical sense, was to abide for ever in the Church, although she was herself the accomplishment and fulfilment of the great promises of God, and might be said not to look forward to anything greater than herself, except the consummation of the Kingdom of our Lord in Heaven. Nevertheless, she was not to be without this great gift of the manifestation by His chosen servants of the counsels of God as to the future. Thus our Lord laid down, in His great discourse on Mount Olivet, the whole future as regarded the Church, at least in outline. The strain was to be caught up by St. John, but the last book of the canonical Scriptures was to be a heavenly prophecy. If the Church has no great collections of prophecy, as the Jews had, it is for the reason already mentioned, that in her the roll of prophecy

is fulfilled. But this does not exclude the presence of the gift within her, and its exercise by those of her children in whom it especially resides.

It has always been a favourite thought with Christian contemplatives, that our Lord arranged for His Blessed Mother to follow Him to the Cenacle, in which the Paschal Supper was celebrated, the Blessed Eucharist instituted, the first Mass offered, the first ordinations and consecrations performed, and the first Communions given, and that before leaving the house with His disciples for the Garden of Gethsemani, He took a tender and solemn leave of her, that she might be a consenting party to the Passion which was so soon to follow. Christians have felt about this as they have felt about the morning of the Resurrection, that our Lady must have had a part in all these holy communications, even before all others. The silence of the Gospels is the same in both cases, and indeed, with regard to the Resurrection, the case is stronger than with regard to her presence at the Last Supper, because the Sacred Text seems to say that our Lord did not appear first to Mary.

The truth in all cases of this kind seems to be, that our Lord's dealings with His Blessed Mother in all these mysteries were not a part of the history as it fell to the lot of the Evangelists to record it. They would probably have been surprised indeed to think that any other theory had been formed as to their silence. Our Lady is indeed mentioned by them as standing at the foot of the Cross, and thus it might appear that if the Gospels mention one thing concerning her an argument may be drawn

from their not mentioning another. But the presence of Mary at the Cross was a part of the great mystery of Calvary itself, and the words spoken on that occasion were not for herself alone, but for the whole Church and for all time. They belonged to the foreordained decree of the redemption, and of her position therein and in the Kingdom founded thereupon. There was therefore a reason for their insertion in the history of the Sacred Passion, which would not apply to the Last Supper, the institution or celebration of the Holy Eucharist, and other great incidents of that solemn time of leave-taking or of welcome from the grave. We may conclude the very great importance of the word spoken to our Lady on the Cross from the silence regarding her at other times. But the fact of her being mentioned then does not show that she was not present at other times when she is not mentioned, and when there was not the same peremptory reason for the mention of her presence.

The appearance of our Lord to the holy women, and first of them to St. Mary Magdalene, is recorded in the Gospels, because it was by means of the holy women first that the appointed witnesses of the Resurrection, that is the Apostles, were informed of the fact of the marvel to which they were to witness to the whole world. The women were not the witnesses, but they were the persons from whom the witnesses learnt the fact, though they were so difficult to convince that they did not believe the words of the women. Our Blessed Lady was not one of those sent as messengers or informants to the Apostles, and so she does not come anywhere,

whether first or last, in the list of those informants. In the same way with regard to all that passed at the Last Supper and on that eventful night between our Lord and the Apostles. That was one part of the history, the part which it fell within the province of the Gospels to preserve for the Church in all ages, like the other things which they record concerning the experiences of the Apostles. Our Lady belongs to a different part of the sacred dispensation, and our Lord's dealings with her, as has been said, do not belong to the evangelical narratives as such. But they belong to the Christian contemplation on the history of our Lord, which must of necessity extend itself to many things, either certainly true, or reasonably probable, for which we have not the authority of the Evangelists, though we cannot suppose that the Evangelists did not know them.

CHAPTER II.

HOLY THURSDAY.

THE last days and hours before the Sacred Passion of our Lord are remarkable in two several ways. First, they must have been crowded with actions and sayings and arrangements for the future, to an extent which seems marvellous, even among the doings of our Lord. All was done with the most perfect calm and, as it were, in leisurely order, without hurry, amidst all the swiftness with which He acted. But still there were great acts almost without number to be gone through, so that, if they were all related at full, the account might occupy many large volumes. The Church perfectly understands that large portions of the sayings and doings of those days and nights are left untold, not only from the very multitude of what might have had to be related, but also from the fact that many sayings and doings were not of that class which was to be committed to the Evangelical records. Such was all that related directly to the positive institutions of the Christian Church, or, again, to interior and spiritual histories, the dealings of our Lord with single souls, and the like. But what we know must have been done or said, on account of its connection with things that are absolutely recorded, is of itself

very copious, and we may well suppose that much more of which we have but little conception was said and done at this time. But all was done with immense swiftness and peace.

Another feature which is remarkable at this time is that our Lord appears to have increased His manifestations of loving and tender affectionateness, as the time of the Passion drew nearer. St. John gives us a hint as to this when he says, that our Lord, "knowing that His hour was now come that He should pass out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, loved them unto the end."¹ These words may refer especially to the great outpouring of love in the institution of the Blessed Sacrament, but even that excess of love was but a specimen of the whole tenour of His conduct at that time. Our Lord was going to His Father. This filled His Heart with ineffable joy, which made Him more communicative than ever before of the love that was in His Heart for us. This excessive love showed itself in every incident and word of that last evening with His disciples. Apart from all other considerations which suggest themselves as causes of this increase of lovingness, He knew that He was going to die for the sins of the world, and He had during the last few days experienced the greatest ingratitude and been the object of the foulest conspiracy on the part both of His enemies and of the poor Apostle who had leagued himself with them. Treatment of this kind makes imperfect men angry, and to some extent sour, at least it drives them in on themselves

¹ St. John xiii. 1.

and closes their hearts against others. But to perfect sanctity such trials act in another and in a contrary manner, letting loose new streams of love and beneficence, and throwing a calm brightness and tenderness over the whole demeanour which had not been so discernible before. Thus we must enter on our considerations of the acts and sayings of Holy Thursday with this thought in our mind as well as the other. Not only were the things said and done most wonderful in their greatness and their multiplicity, but they were said and done with an excess of love and devotion which seemed in itself something new, even to those who like St. John had long been most watchful students of the Sacred Heart.

These two features in what was about to happen would make it more reasonable than ever, if we needed any fresh reason, to think that our Blessed Lady was, as the contemplatives of the Church tell us, present in the house in which the Last Supper was celebrated, the Blessed Sacrament instituted, and in which all the other wonders of our Lord's love were manifested. For it would hardly be in harmony with the manner of our Lord's dealings with her all through, if she had not been present on that occasion, when He was to pour out so lavishly the marvels of His love, and when so many of the most important acts of His whole life were to take place. For, apart from the intense love which He bore to her, and which would make Him desire that she should share in all the bounties which He was now to display towards others, her presence would be wanted, that He might have by Him the heart

that could alone fully understand what He was doing, and, in particular, correspond to the immense love which was glowing and working in His Heart. In what manner our Lady may have been present at the Last Supper may not be quite certain. Maria de Agreda tells us that she followed our Lord with some of the holy women to the house provided by the unnamed but most blessed disciple who was His host, and the host of all the Church, on that evening. In this house there were many rooms, in one of which our Lady took her place, whence she could hear or see what went on in the Cenacle. We may adopt this suggestion, as helping us to form some picture in our own minds of the whole scene. It was also arranged that she might in some way, natural or supernatural, receive Holy Communion directly after our Lord.

The events of the last evening in the Cenacle are, as has been already said, very many in number, and it would be foreign to the purpose of this work to comment upon each at any length.² It is only necessary to remind ourselves of them, in order that we may meditate on the effect they would have on our Blessed Lady, and on her affections and prayers concerning each. The legal supper of the Pasch seems to have come first, after which our Lord gave the disciples who had partaken of it with Him the chalice of which St. Luke speaks, which was a cup of wine passed round after the Pasch had been eaten.³ Then followed the preparation for the simple ordinary supper, which is what the Evangelists

² *Story of the Gospels*, §§ 151—157.

³ St. Luke xxii. 17.

speak of when they mention our Lord as sitting down or lying down with the twelve. The Pasch was eaten with haste, with their garments girt as if for a journey, and it was taken standing, probably in a short space of time. There may have been some interval between the two suppers, in which our Lord is thought by some to have explained to the Apostles the significance of the ceremonies and rites which they had just performed, and how all was now to be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.

We have more than once hints in the Gospel narratives of the custom of washing the feet before meals, the omission of which custom was once noted as a kind of fault by our Lord in one of His entertainers.⁴ Our Lord now took up this custom, as it were, and consecrated it to a great spiritual meaning, in the washing of the feet of the disciples, according to the account of St. John. He rose from the table, we are told, and thus it seems likely that the washing of the feet took place at the very beginning of the ordinary supper, as soon as the disciples had arranged themselves in their places on the couches on which they reclined. It was then that St. Peter resisted our Lord's action, and it seems that he was the first at whose feet our Lord placed Himself. He was reprimanded by our Lord, and forced to submit, and then, after the whole ceremony had been gone through, our Lord told them of the obligation laid upon them of following His example of humility. He added a few words about the dignity of His ministers, after having spoken, for the first time that evening, of His approaching

⁴ St. Luke vii. 44; see also xi. 38.

betrayal by one of them, the thought being naturally suggested by His words about their being all clean, which almost forced Him to show that He knew that His words did not apply to all.

It was now, then, during the ordinary supper, that our Lord spoke about His betrayer, that the Apostles asked Him, "Lord, is it I?" that St. John at the request of St. Peter asked Him who it was, and that our Lord gave the sop to Judas from the dish. After the reception of the morsel, we are told that Satan entered into or took possession of him, and that he went out, having received from our Lord the injunction which concealed his purpose from the rest of the disciples, "What thou doest, do quickly." It is here also that should be placed the first warning to St. Peter, which was called forth by his protest that he would follow our Lord anywhere, and lay down his life for His sake, and also the dispute among the disciples who was to be the greater, perhaps suggested by Peter's vehement protestations, which seemed to raise him above his brethren, the words of our Lord to St. Peter about His having prayed for him that his faith might not fail, the second warning about the denial, and the words about the two swords. All these things seem naturally to precede the institution of the adorable Sacrament, and we must probably add to these that part of the long discourse given by St. John which contains the questions and observations of St. Thomas, St. Philip, and St. Jude, with our Lord's words in answer.⁵

It is here, however, that we must probably

⁵ St. John xiv. 1—31.

suppose that there is a great gap in the narratives of the Evangelists. The institution of the Blessed Eucharist Itself is only mentioned by the first three in very few words, and not at all by the fourth. St. Luke alone adds the important words in which our Lord bade the Apostles "do this in commemoration of Me," which words, according to the Catholic teaching, contain the truth of the institution of the Christian priesthood, without which they would be comparatively meaningless. The Church teaches us that the Apostles were then made priests of the New Testament. We have already seen that it is not a part of the purpose of the Gospels to relate, directly and formally, the class of acts to which this institution of the priesthood belongs, and therefore it must not surprise us to find it omitted in the narratives of what passed on this Thursday evening. But we must be quite sure that, at some time or other, the Christian priesthood was formally instituted by our Blessed Lord Himself, and the statement of the Church that it was done at the time of the Last Supper, when the Holy Communion was first given, and when our Lord celebrated, as we should say, the first Mass, is in itself the most reasonable account that could be given of the certain fact, especially when we consider the words just mentioned. But, if it be so reasonable that the priesthood should have been instituted at this time, there is very great reason for thinking, further, that other great institutions of the same class were also made at that time. It must be quite certain that the Apostles must have had some instruction in order to their receiving Holy Communion rightly,

devoutly, and with profit, and that they must also have been instructed if they were to understand the sacrificial words, "Do this in commemoration of Me." Thus we have very great reason for thinking, as has been said, that there is here a very large omission indeed of matters of the utmost importance to the Church, as to which she was to receive her knowledge in other ways than from the Gospels.

The only great teaching on the doctrine of the Blessed Sacrament of which there is any record in the Gospels is the long discourse preserved in the sixth chapter of St. John. But that leaves the doctrine of the Blessed Sacrament itself without its full completeness, and requires the narrative of the institution which is here given to make it perfect. Nor does it say anything clearly about the great doctrine of the Sacrifice. Here then is a solid reason for supposing that on this occasion our Lord poured out the whole wonderful riches of the doctrines and ordinances connected with the Blessed Sacrament, and, indeed, with the whole sacramental system which was to be founded on His Passion, and to convey to men so simply and so efficaciously the fruits of that Passion. It may seem a great omission on the part of the Evangelists, if this was really the case, and yet they did not mention it. But the answer to this difficulty has already been given more than once. We are here speaking of a class of communications which it was not the office of the Evangelists to hand on. It is most probable, therefore, that on this evening our Lord gave the Apostles full instruction on this most important part of His work in the world. And the words already men-

tioned, which seem so clearly to convey the injunction of the exercise by the Apostles of their priestly powers, in celebrating the commemorative Sacrifice of Holy Mass, imply moreover the further truth, that they were then solemnly ordained.

The words of St. John, which form the beginning of our fifteenth chapter, about the vine and the branches, seem to point naturally to a break in the long discourse in which they occur, and they are immediately preceded by the words, of which no explanation is given, "Arise, let us go hence." It seems very natural to think that after the last mentioned words some change of place occurred for the whole company, as if they had then risen from table, and proceeded to another room or part of the room, and there our Lord had celebrated Holy Communion, after giving to the Apostles the instructions of which we have been speaking concerning the sacramental system of His Church, and especially concerning the Adorable Sacrifice itself. The discourse from this point is broken by none of the questionings which mark its earlier stages, and the doctrine about the Office of the Holy Ghost and the effects of our Lord's going to the Father for the purpose of sending the Paraclete in His Name, seems to belong very naturally to a time when the intelligence of the Apostles had been enlightened, and their hearts inflamed by the reception of the Holy Communion. It would be out of place here to comment on this great discourse at any length, or even on the climax of all our Lord said or did on this evening. This was the Divine and most efficacious prayer which He poured forth before

leaving the Cenacle, the great prayer of the High Priest of the New Testament to the Father for the unity of the Church. What has been said must suffice for a brief outline of the events of this Thursday evening. We may now proceed to consider them in the heart and mind of our Blessed Lady.

It has already been said that she was present either actually or spiritually in the Cenacle, and certainly the presence of one who could so thoroughly enter into the feelings, intentions, and desires of her Blessed Son must have been singularly opportune at such a time, when He was indeed pouring out the very choicest treasures of His Heart. With all the great holiness and devotion of the Apostles, it is clear that they were not yet capable of understanding their Master, of following with enlightened appreciation the multifarious and exquisite devices of His charity. When He celebrated for this last time the Paschal feast, it was well that there should be someone there who could enter into all its full meaning, the service which its yearly commemoration had rendered to the honour of God and the welfare of souls, throughout all those centuries which had elapsed since its institution, both in stirring up gratitude to God, in encouraging the people to faithfulness to His law, and in keeping alive the hope and expectation of a deliverance far greater and more lasting than the deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. In that celebration by our Lord, the old Covenant was folded up and laid aside with honour and thanksgiving, and this was almost immediately followed by the introduction of the great feast of the New Testament.

The incidents which followed after the Paschal Supper were also far above the Apostles in their spiritual import, and were probably ordered by our Lord as an introduction for the new feast of the Holy Communion. Our Lady might be able to understand the mystery concealed under the washing of the feet, which was in a manner necessary then as the prelude to the new banquet, which required a special and immediate purification to fit them for it. For it has been considered in the Church that the washing of the feet of the Apostles was intended to represent that purification of the soul from daily faults, which should be practised by all those who celebrate Holy Mass or who receive Holy Communion, if it may be, by the reception of the Sacrament of Penance, or at least by the exercise of contrition and of some holy prayer or action which may remove the dust of venial sins from the soul. And it may be thought that the complaint about the betrayal, and the words and acts which followed, were arranged by our Lord with the same view also to what was immediately to be. For thus, if Judas would not let himself be touched by the most tender pleading of our Lord humbling Himself at his feet, he might at least be moved by the manifestation of His knowledge of his treachery, or be given the opportunity of leaving the Cenacle at once. St. John seems to mention the ignorance of the Apostles concerning this treachery with a sort of admiring wonder at the charity of our Lord, in providing for the concealment from any eyes of theirs. Perhaps also there may be in the measures taken by our Lord for the removal of Judas, a further lesson of

exquisite prudence, in preventing him from adding to his guilt by the participation of Holy Communion, without any revelation of his evil state.

In any case all these sayings and doings and arrangements of our Lord must have been far more intelligible to our Lady than any other, and thus her presence would provide in this way for that loving and continual homage of gratitude and interior praise which it was her delight to be always ministering to Him. And the intelligence which she had of the greatness of what our Lord was doing in all these acts preliminary to the introduction of His greatest gift of love in the Holy Communion, must have furnished her with a fresh number of subjects for her loving intercessions. If this is true of the acts and sayings of our Lord before the moment came for the instructions about the sacraments, and for their institution itself, what must have been the value of her presence when that institution was made, with all its endless fruits and blessings in time and in eternity! Our Lady was then, as it were, in the place of the whole Church of all ages in her praise and thanksgiving, and she had before her not only one great boon, like that of the Adorable Sacrifice or of Holy Communion or of the abiding Presence of our Lord in the Tabernacle, with all its fruits in the soul of whatever kind, but the whole range of that marvellous sacramental septenary, which included Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, as well as the Blessed Eucharist, a set of gifts which encompass and supernaturalize human life from its beginning to the last moment of its earthly stage,

and which last on in their divine effects throughout all eternity.

When our Lord spoke to His Apostles about this immense crown of boons, all of which were the gifts of His redeeming love to the race of man, steeped in the Blood He was about to shed on the Cross, He probably made little of them, as was His way, mentioning them almost as if they were to cost Him nothing, and were ordinary offerings. And yet certainly it would require no less than the illuminated intelligence of His own Mother to rate their value as it deserved, or rather as it could be rated, no less than the rapturous glow of her intense love to reward His Heart duly for them. Outside was the night, into which Judas, as St. John tells us, had gone forth, the night which was soon to be lit up by the torches and lanterns of the armed band, sent by the enemies of our Lord to seize Him in the Garden, the night that represented the miserable world which He came to redeem, and which was so ignorant of its own needs and miseries, and of His power, as to turn on Him with all its malice and bring Him to death. But in the Cenacle, within which were assembled our Lord and His Mother and the holiest souls in the world, all was light and peace and calm thankfulness, and there the foundations were being laid for the glory of God on earth and in Heaven which was to last for ever. The Death of our Lord was to call into being the powers, as St. Paul calls them, "of the world to come," which were to give to men the might of angels, and transform earth into the ante-chamber of Heaven. And there was at least one heart there that could follow out the

great counsel of God which was being executed by the Incarnate Son, in a manner which transcended the thoughts of the Angels themselves, and which by its prayers was to have a large share in the application of the marvellous graces thus created for the benefit of mankind. Mary could not see into the future, as our Lord could see, she could not trace with infallible and distinct accuracy all the workings of Divine grace in every human soul, but she could understand the immensity of the blessings now so freely offered, the beauty of the Divine contrivance by which they were made easy of access, the simplicity and the humility of the means and instruments and ministers by which they were to be conveyed to men.

But if the sacramental system in general must have filled the heart of our Lady with gratitude and wonder, how much more must she have felt at the knowledge of that still greater condescension by which the Incarnate Son Himself became the Sacrifice as well as the High Priest of the New Covenant, renewing day after day in the Church the offering of Himself to His Father which was first offered on Calvary! If the sacraments in general convey the grace of the New Testament, this Adorable Sacrifice contains the Author of grace Himself, and He is Himself made therein the food of the soul by the eating and drinking of His Precious Body and Blood. Certainly no heart but Mary's could take in the ineffable excess of this mercy or render to our Lord the thanks which He deserved from mankind. With her great intelligence of the ways of God in the world and of the ways of the world in its recep-

tion and treatment of His bounties, she may well have foreseen, at least in conjecture, what was to be the future with regard to the Blessed Sacrament and the Adorable Sacrifice, at what a cost of humiliation, and insult, and sacrilege, this crowning condescension was to be carried out, and she must have seen in this a still further reason for gratitude and praise, and for devotion of herself henceforth to the special worship and veneration of the Blessed Sacrament, in which our Lord chose to dwell on earth till the end of time, notwithstanding all that cost. The first idea of reparation to Him was thus born in her heart. She was the first and most intelligent and most loving worshipper of her Son, from the moment of the Incarnation, and now that He had taken to Himself this new mode of existence, she became at once the first and most intelligent and most loving of His worshippers therein.

It seems impossible to doubt that she received Holy Communion on this its first institution, and that her reception of her Son was the most perfect, the most humble, the most loving, and therefore the most profitable to her soul, that was ever made in the Church, except on later occasions by herself. She had much indeed to go through during the hours which followed on that blessed Communion. The whole of the Passion was to fall upon our Lord, and on her, the whole weight of that most crushing sorrow which was to wreak itself on her Compassion. It is universally believed that, whatever may have been the degree to which the faith and courage of others wavered, she bore herself all through that trying scene with the most serene and penetrating

faith, as well as with the most intense pain, that her faith and her hope and her conformity to the Divine decrees were brighter and stronger than ever, and the support of the whole Church. It does not seem well to suppose that for this great and unexampled trial she was left without the strength which her soul would have derived from Holy Communion. Hers was the most perfect Communion, as has been said, and, though it would not be true to say that she would have failed without it, for our Lord could supply her with the necessary strength in other ways, still it may increase our devotion and intelligence of the ways of God to consider this as one of the first triumphs of a soul fortified by the sacramental reception of our Lord.

There are a number of beautiful features in the last conversation of our Lord with His Apostles, and especially the long prayer which He uttered to His Father before leaving the Cenacle, which must have been the occasions of great acts of adoration and thanksgiving on the part of our Lady, but on which we cannot dwell with full particularity. The lovingness of our Lord rises to its highest pitch in the last words addressed to the Apostles, about the persecutions they were to undergo for Him and about the coming of the Holy Ghost and the effects of His coming, which is one of the subjects which He seems to have reserved especially for this last discourse. It was probably a great revelation to the Apostles to hear so much about the Paraclete, and when at last our Lord told them plainly that He had come from the Father into the world, and was now about to leave the world, in order that He

might go to the Father, they broke out in thankfulness for the clearness of the disclosure, which seemed to them to be a fuller manifestation concerning His Divine Person than any they had before received. The prayer to the Eternal Father must again have been a great disclosure to them, concerning the object of His Mission in the Divine counsels, and above all concerning the one great point on which the prayer insists, namely, the importance to His Heart of unity among the children of the Church. He appears to have alluded directly to the institution of the Blessed Sacrament, which is meant, as some of the Fathers tell us, when our Lord speaks of the "glory" which His Father has given to Him,⁶ and which He in turn has given to them, that they may be one as He and His Father are One. The sublime truths which are thus mentioned in the last words of our Lord before going forth to His Passion, belong to a range of doctrines with which no one of the disciples could have been familiar, though they may have been long ago in the possession of the Blessed Mother, who was therefore singularly able to understand her Divine Son, and to give Him the thanks and homage which His immense charity and condescension would call for from the Church.

⁶ St. John xvii. 22.

CHAPTER III.

THE COMPASSION OF MARY IN GENERAL.

THERE exist a great number of beautiful meditations and contemplations on the sorrows of our Blessed Lady during the Passion of our Lord, many of which are founded on various revelations of saints and others, who may have had preternatural communications on these great subjects. It would be impossible, within the limits of the space at our disposal, to give anything like an epitome of these, which are in many cases exceedingly striking. It must be enough for us to remind ourselves of certain great outlines which must in any case be followed in our considerations on this part of the history of the Blessed Mother. When we have set down certain things which must always be remembered as the foundations of contemplation on this Divine subject, the manner in which details are filled in may be left very much to the character of the contemplative whom we may follow.

The intelligence of our Blessed Lady was raised, by the graces which she had received in such abundance from the very first, and which had been so continually added to during her long life, both by the free bounty of God and by what she could win by her own most faithful cooperation thereto, to the

most perfect comprehension that could exist in a created being of all the great truths which lie at the foundation of all serious contemplation on the Passion of our Lord. That is to say, she had a most perfect intelligence of the greatness and majesty of God, as well as of the other attributes which were called into exercise in the mystery of the Sacred Passion, of His ineffable holiness, and the injuries which had been heaped upon it by the sins of all the world, of His inexorable justice, which required a condign satisfaction for those sins, of the absolute completeness of the atonement which had to be wrought by the sufferings of her Son, and of the infinite love of God in providing so marvellous a remedy, so copious a redemption, for the outrages against Himself.

Further also than this, it was the will of God, as St. Paul says, to "restore all things" in our Lord, and thus the issues of His sufferings were not to be confined to the satisfaction due to sin alone. They were to repair the vacant spaces in Heaven, as well as to renovate earth. They were to heal this life as well as secure for us the next. They were to manifest God as He had never been known before, they were to raise men to a higher level than that which they had lost, they were to be the foundation of a new Kingdom more beautiful than any that could have existed in Paradise. They were to reach throughout all eternity, and to be felt throughout all the creation of God. The mind of our Blessed Lady was enlarged and expanded by the grace of God to that full comprehension of these great truths which was possible in any one short of God Himself. It

is natural to think that that beyond and above everything else her thoughts dwelt on and were absorbed by these truths of the majesty of God, His holiness outraged by sin, the enormity of guilt thus contracted, the immensity of the satisfaction, and the cost at which it was to be exacted, as also of the incomprehensible goodness and love which provided such a remedy, and of the marvellous system, the invention of the Sacred Heart, in which that remedy was to be stored up for the benefit of untold generations. She could follow the wisdom and mercy of God step by step, in every detail of the Passion, as well as His ineffable justice and intense hatred of sin, which did not prevent Him from showing so marvellous a love to sinners.

Next to her thoughts concerning God would come her most wonderful knowledge of our Blessed Lord in His Sacred Humanity, the royal dignity of His Person, with all the treasures of knowledge, power, and grace stored up therein, the beauty and preciousness of His Soul and Body, the intensity of the sufferings of which they were capable, the keenness of His sensibility to pain, whether mental, moral, or physical, the searching completeness of the torments of every kind to which He subjected Himself at the bidding of the Father, the absolute dereliction to which He submitted, the entire desolation and disfigurement which then fell upon His Sacred Humanity at His death. She could understand the minute particularity of His sufferings as well as their intense painfulness, how each one was proportioned to the sins for which He was to atone, which in their malignity and ineffable foulness, and

in their outrage to God and to the purity and dignity of His own Person, were present in each pang of expiation, and formed the bitterest part of the pain by which their guilt was punished. And she could understand also how by means of the Passion the graces and beauties and dignity of that Sacred Humanity were to be communicated to men with a bountifulness so abundant and an efficacy so mighty, as to make it seem as if men would have been worse off without the sin which had been so atoned for and so repaired.

We reasonably think that in the Passion Mary had that great privilege of which we have so often spoken at other times in her life, of entering into the feelings and affections of the Sacred Heart, and thus sharing His sorrows. Indeed, all this knowledge and intelligence only served to sharpen the sword by which her own heart was being pierced at each moment, on account of her incomparable tenderness and the unimaginable vehemence of her love for Him, which had swollen from the mighty force which it was when she conceived Him in her womb, to a height and depth and length and breadth of which no heart but her own was capable, by the continual exercises of immeasurable love, given and returned, during every moment of His life as her Son and of her life as His Mother. Even in our own poor experience we learn that the hearts that can suffer the most are those that can love the most, and we must be content to leave undescribed and unfathomed that love of Mary for her Son, and of her Son for her, which was now made by God the great instrument of the crucifixion of both. There is something in

the passionateness and excitement of ordinary human grief which blunts the edge of the sword, and mercifully dulls the pain which its sharpness causes. Again, in great human griefs there is often an insensibility which supervenes, and so, for a time at least, saves the victim from all that might else be suffered. But in the sorrows of Mary for the Passion of our Lord there was neither excitement nor dulness. The sword pierced keenly, and there was no waste of pain, no dulling influence to lull the sensibility of suffering.

The foregoing thoughts may help us to see that our Lady met the great trial of the Passion with the eye of her soul singly fixed on God, Whose will was being worked out through all. The Passion was to her a great judicial act for the chastisement of sin, out of which was to flow a magnificence in the elevation and enrichment of those whose sins were chastised, a glory to God, an honour and triumph and joy to the Redeemer Who suffered, such as God only could imagine and carry out. Her thought was that which was afterwards expressed by the Apostles, when they spoke of the combination against our Lord of all the powers of the world, "Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, to do what Thy hand and Thy counsel decreed to be done."¹ And we may think that the same consideration extended to her own most bitter sufferings, which were also decreed by the "hand and counsel" of the Father, as is implied in the words in which holy Simeon had spoken to her about the sword that was to pierce

¹ Acts iv. 27, 28.

her own heart. In such a view of the circumstances of the Passion, there could be but little room for any indignant complaint or resentment against the human agents who were working out the will of God. Our Lord looked on them all with the most intense pity and love, and our Lady's thoughts and feelings concerning them must have reflected the compassion of the Sacred Heart. The bitterest pang of the whole Passion is said to have been the despair and suicide of Judas, because they would remove him irrevocably from the number of those who might still profit by the reconciliation which their wickedness had helped to bring about through the Blood shed on Calvary. Such would be the feelings with which our Lady would regard the chief priests, Pilate and Herod, the howling mob, the false witnesses, the savages who tortured our Lord beyond the requirements of the sentence passed on Him, such as the soldiers who scourged Him, and then crowned Him with thorns and mocked Him as a pretended King. The terrible pain of her heart left no room for anger, and the clear grasp with which she possessed the truth of the atoning character of the Sacrifice, made it easy for her to wrap round the most wanton of our Lord's enemies the folds of her motherly compassion.

Thus the various incidents in the Passion, which seem to us so strange in their confusion, as if the whole band of those concerned in the Death of our Lord had gone mad, or had been handed over to be possessed by devils, were in the eyes of Mary clothed in the same character of order and swift harmonious succession as the incidents of the last evening in the

Cenacle, of which we spoke in the last chapter. Hell was indeed let loose, and worked out its malignant purpose to the full, by the hands of men who did not know what they were doing, as our Lord said. But all was exactly arranged by God. Not one single outburst of malice or outrage of savagery but was duly weighed and permitted by the justice of the Father. All fell on the Sacred Heart from His hand, and all fell on the heart of that most dolorous Mother as the choice of His most adorable and most beloved will, working out thereby His own immense and unparalleled glory, the honour of His Son, and the salvation of the human race. And thus we understand how it is no exaggeration, that which is said by some of the Fathers, that our Lady's heart was so perfectly united to the Divine will that, if it had been necessary for its full accomplishment, she would have helped herself in the raising her Son upon the Cross. For no one but our Lord clung with greater devotion than Mary to that adorable will, no one but He saw in it more perfect beauty, more wonderful wisdom, more infinite compassion and mercy. No one but He saw in the sins which were thus to be wiped away more deadly foulness and more loathsome degradation of the creature made in the image of God and destined for the possession of Him hereafter. No one but He could see the value of the graces which were purchased for mankind by the sufferings of those hours in a more full and piercing light.

To say this is not to say that the Compassion of our Lady was in any way less keen and poignant on this account. As our Lord suffered to a degree

which no one else ever attained in the way of pain, of shame, of weariness, of desolation, and weakness, notwithstanding that His will was so perfectly united to the Divine will, and that He had the most perfect certainty of His ultimate triumph in His Resurrection from the dead, so also our Lady could suffer the intensest pain for Him and with Him, although she had this most perfect conformity to the sentence of the Divine justice and mercy which had decreed it all, her sufferings as well as those of her Son. Rather, the solemn judicial character of the pains of the Passion sharpened every pang and added weight to every blow. For everything came in the most intense and unbroken severity as the expression of the anger of the Father at the sins with which His Son was clothed in His sight, the sins which He had made His own for the purpose of their expiation, the sins of which in more than one place of Sacred Scripture He speaks of as His. The anger of God was something sharper than the scourge, bitterer than the vinegar and gall, more hard to bear than the nails and the crown of thorns. If all the pangs of the Passion had been put in one balance, and all the anger of God in the other, the first would have seemed a chalice of delight in comparison to the last. But the two crosses were not, and could not be, separated either in the mind and heart of our Lord or in the mind and heart of His Blessed Mother. It was not only that He had to suffer so much. It was that He had to suffer so much from the anger of His Father, and on account of sin. St. Paul says "the sting of death is sin," and it may be said most truly of all our Lord's

Passion that sin was its sting, and the hand which drove it home was the hand of the justice of God.

Apart from this consideration, it is reasonable to think that our Lady, instead of being in any way or degree rendered less sensitive to the sufferings of her Son or to her own in the Passion, was more probably fortified in a marvellous manner, not against the pain which she had to undergo, but against the natural power of all that pain to take away her life before she had suffered to the utmost, according to the decree of God. We have seen elsewhere that it might have pleased God to take her away before the Passion, lest she should have that most terrible of sufferings to bear, but that He had in His Providence arranged that her extreme suffering on Calvary should fulfil a part of His purpose in her regard, and in regard to her Son, and be the foundation of another disposition of the same Providence with regard to her position in the Kingdom founded on the Passion. St. Joseph was taken away, but our Lady was not taken away. It was in the counsels of God that she should be with our Lord in that last scene of agony and torment, that He might have that suffering, also, of her companionship in His sorrows, and that she also might have all the additional grief to bear which came from her witnessing His last agony. The Divinity of our Lord is thought to have sustained Him miraculously, in order, not that He might have comfort under His sufferings, but that He might suffer more than His Humanity could have borne without special assistance. There may have been something of the same kind about the sorrows of Mary on Calvary,

and this is far more likely than that there should have been any preternatural assistance given to prevent her from feeling to the utmost what a mother such as she was would feel on such an occasion.

It is natural that we should add to this, as has been said, another thought to which it naturally leads, namely, that it was in the Providence of God that Mary should suffer in this way for the accomplishment of a great purpose of God. She was under a sentence, as her Son was under a sentence. She was to bear now the travail pangs which she had been spared when our Lord came forth at Bethlehem from her most pure and immaculate womb. The Passion was to be communicated to her, as the saints tell us, in a way and with a result which has no parallel in the similar communications which have from time to time been made to some of the chosen servants of God. Her sufferings could not share in the redeeming efficacy which belonged alone to those of our Lord. But, as she was to have so large a power in His Kingdom in the application of the merits of the Passion, as also so unrivalled and unique a share in the spiritual graces won thereby, it was a part of God's counsel that she, as the Mother of the Crucified, should share, as far as was possible for her, in the sorrow and in the merit of the Sacrifice of her Son. Her presence on Calvary was no accident, but a counsel of God. She appears there as she appears in the mystery of the sanctification of St. John Baptist at the Visitation, and in the mystery of the beginning of signs at the marriage-feast of Cana. In all these mysteries Mary is an intelligent and willing cooperator in the

Divine work which is being accomplished, as she was the cause, by her *fiat*, of the accomplishment of the Incarnation itself. In the Visitation, her words brought about the interior sanctification of the soul of one of the highest of the saints, the soul of whom our Lord said that among those born of women there had not arisen a greater than he. At Cana, her words brought about the opening of the gates of God's mercy on mankind in the physical miracles of our Lord. On Calvary, she consents, at the cost of infinite pangs of her own, to the Sacrifice on which hangs the redemption of the world, and as she has so large a communication of the pains of that sacrifice, she has also to win thereby her large communication of its powers. It is then that she is crowned as the second Eve, the Mother of all that live.

When we think, therefore, of Mary at the foot of the Cross, we must consider her as being there by the Providence of God to share in the sufferings of her Son, brought upon her by the infliction on Him of the chastisements due to the sins of the world. We must gather up all our highest conceptions and conclusions as to her intelligence of Him and her love for Him, all that she has learnt of His dignity and His ineffable loveliness, her estimate of Him as God and Man, all that her long study of the beauties of the Sacred Humanity, so freely opened to her, has accumulated in her heart. Her long and tender familiarity with Him has taught her to anticipate His thoughts, to read His glances, to interpret His gestures. She knows what pains Him and pleases Him, what He shrinks from, what He loves. She knows the delicacy of His purity, the sensitiveness

of His charity, the shrinking shyness of His modesty, as well as His fathomless love for souls and His boundless devotion to His Father. And she has, as we think, preternatural sympathies with Him also, which enables her to read the designs, the desires, the hidden pangs and revulsions of the Sacred Heart. Herself the tenderest heart next to His, with capacities alike of joy and of pain to which our most refined feelings are dull and gross indeed, she is launched on these sixteen or eighteen hours, between the exit from the Cenacle and the expiration on the Cross, to bear in her heart what He bears in His, and in His Body as well. No pang is lost upon her, nor any display of character, nor any example of virtue. She notes when He speaks as God, as when He cast down the armed band by the simple word, "I am He," when He speaks as Judge, as when He foretold to the Sanhedrin His coming in the clouds of Heaven, when He speaks as King, as to Pilate and to the thief, when He witnesses to the truth, as before the tribunals whenever He spoke, His use of His power of conversion, as when He looked on Peter, His compassion for the women of Jerusalem, His patient charitable toil for the Roman Governor, His stern silence to Herod, His poignant grief over Judas, His pity for His executioners. Nothing is without its due response in her heart, all is treasured up and pondered there.

It may be convenient to divide our consideration of the Compassion of Mary into three parts, according to the stages of the history in which she took part in a different way. For several hours, how long we know not, it seems likely that she did not

witness the actions of our Lord except spiritually. It is not easy to think of her as present in the Garden, or at the apprehension of our Lord, or to suppose that she followed Him into the palace of the High Priest, or through the streets to the Prætorium. The first part of the Passion, therefore, nearly up to the Scourging, was spent by our Lady in some retired spot near at hand, whence she could be called by St. John when the time came for what it was ordained that she should witness. After this follow several hours, during which she was either close to or not very far from our Lord, and when she witnessed almost all that passed, except perhaps when He was alone with Pilate. This space of time includes also the final Sentence, the Way of the Cross, and the Crucifixion. We may make the third part of the Compassion begin when the executions have done their work. The cries and mockings gradually die away, the darkness draws on in which the Three Hours are shrouded. This is the time of the most solemn mysteries, the Seven Words, the vinegar and gall, the breathing forth of the Soul of our Lord into the hands of His Father. But with our Lord the Passion ends with His Death, with Mary the Compassion lasts on beyond His Death. She has to witness the piercing of His Heart, the Water and Blood, the Birth of the Church. The daylight returns to light up the solemn stillness in which He is taken from the Cross, and laid first in her arms, then in the sepulchre. Then as the shadows of evening thicken around her, she leaves Him there with the stone rolled up and the Roman guard approaching to watch around the Tomb.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GARDEN AND THE TRIBUNALS.

It has been said that the first part of the Sacred Passion, as regards our Blessed Lady's part therein, was that which she must have passed at a distance from our Lord, in some lonely and quiet room in the house in which the Last Supper had taken place. This part of the Passion would embrace, in the first instance, the Prayer and Agony in the Garden, in which altogether an hour or two must have been spent, counting from the time when our Lord and the Apostles left the Cenacle. Then followed the approach of the armed band under the guidance of Judas, and all that occurred before our Lord's apprehension, the apprehension itself, and the flight of the Apostles, the first part of the "Way of Captivity" over the brook Kedron up into the city, until our Lord was placed as a prisoner before the old Pontiff Annas. The tribunal of Annas, where He did not remain long, is the first of the four tribunals before which the Judge of the living and the dead stood as a criminal. From that He was removed, as it seems in chains or bonds, to the palace of Caiphas, which was probably close at hand, and there took place the more formal trial before the assembled members of the Sanhedrin, the

production of the false witnesses, and then the solemn adjuration of Caiphas, to which our Lord, Who had up to that time remained silent before the assembly, replied by declaring that He was the Son of God, and warning them that He was to come hereafter as their Judge. After His condemnation, our Lord was left by His judges, as it was not yet day, to be the prisoner and the sport of the servants and menials, who vented upon him their low spite and insults, as the Evangelists tell us. It may have been just before these began that St. Peter denied Him for the third time, and was converted by the gentle loving glance which our Lord cast upon him. Then followed the second still more formal interrogation and condemnation by the assembled elders, as it was not the rule to condemn by night, the leading of our Lord to Pilate, the dialogues between Pilate and the priests, and Pilate and our Lord, the resolution of the Governor to release Him, then his first sudden thought of making Him the prisoner to be set free by the people on the feast day, the mention of Galilee, and his consequent device to get rid of the matter by sending Him to Herod.

In Herod's palace our Lord was still silent. He was mocked by the guards of the King, and then taken back through the streets in a white robe of scorn to the Roman Governor, with a message from Herod which implied that He was a harmless idiot. This may be considered as the first part of the Passion, during which it does not seem probable that our Blessed Lady was present at what happened to our Lord. We are not certain at what point of the history she left her place of retirement and

anxious prayer, and she may have been near the Prætorium when our Lord passed back from the tribunal of Herod, and have followed Him to the tribunal of Pilate, so as to be present at His rejection by the people, who preferred to Him Barabbas, and who then raised for the first time the terrible cry, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"

We may pause here in the history, for the purpose of endeavouring to follow our Blessed Lady in the thoughts and affections to which this first part of the Passion might give birth. It has already been said that she must be considered as having a most perfect intelligence of the great act which was being performed in the Passion, of its necessity for the redemption of mankind and the restoration of the glory of God, of all its effects and consequences in time and in eternity. She saw in it no accidental outbreak of human cruelty or diabolical malice, but the execution of a severe sentence of the justice of God, prompted by infinite mercy and carried out with infinite wisdom. This includes the fundamental idea of the expiation of the sins of the world by our Lord's sufferings, and Mary would not fail to see that as sin is engendered and born in the heart first of all, it must be in the heart that the expiation and punishment for sin must also have their first workings. Thus our Blessed Lady would be able to follow, as far as any created heart and mind could follow, the interior sufferings of our Lord which began in the Garden of Gethsemani.

No one of the beautiful examples of charity and humility which were then displayed by Him would be lost upon her, and when He gave Himself, so to

say, to the anguish which was to be so great a part of the Passion, she would understand with what loving obedience to God and what intense charity to men there was done by Him. For it was then that He opened His Soul and Heart to be fully flooded by the immense pains which were the fruits of His contrition for all the sins which He took upon Himself without reserve, which the Eternal Father regarded as His. No soul can fathom the depths of that sorrow, for it was the child of His own intense and unparalleled love for God and for His honour, and of His perfect penetration and intelligence of the rights of God, and so of the outrage and insult to His Infinite Majesty which are involved in every single sin. But our Lady's Heart was as like His own as it was possible for it to be, and so she could measure, better than all angels and saints, the pain which pierced Him at the sight of the honour and law and will and goodness and bountifulness of that most beloved Father outraged and trampled in the dust and rewarded with the blackest ingratitude, and at the consciousness that on Himself was now laid, by the justice of God, the iniquity of all, as *Isaias* says. The thought of guiltiness before God was a pang to the Sacred Heart which nothing could assuage, and He had present to Himself every single sin of all those He was to atone for as fully and perfectly as a cause of His sorrow as if there had been but that one to be expiated. The measureless multitude of all our sins, each one seen in its intrinsic foulness and degradation and mischief to God and man, did not dull, in our Lord's Heart, the sense of shame and sorrow and indignation for each one in particular.

But we must not be led into the consideration of the interior agony of our Lord in itself, which belongs more to His Passion than to the Compassion of Mary. It is enough that she felt all this weight of our Lord's most intense anguish, and that not only for the guilt of all our sins and of each in particular, but also for those other reasons which belong to the Agony, namely, the fear and dread, which He now allowed Himself to feel most sensitively, of all the torments and exterior pains which were to be inflicted on Him, whether in the house of Caiphas, or in the Prætorium of Pilate, or in Herod's palace, or on the way to Calvary, or on the Cross itself. And above all, He let Himself anticipate all the pangs of death itself, the slow lingering and ever increasing torture of execution of the Divine sentence, of the terrible tearing up of the natural union between Soul and Body.

Beyond these subjects of the deep penetrating compassion of our Blessed Lady there was also that third element in the agony for her to feel, the element which was in one sense the most powerful of all, because it implied a woe and a grief which could never be cancelled. For our Lord foresaw—and it was this part of the chalice from which we may well suppose that He was thinking when He prayed that it might, if possible, pass from Him—that for so many millions of sins and sinners all His sufferings would be of no avail, at least of no avail as far as that salvation of their souls was concerned which He had in His Heart. No—the merits of His sufferings would be by some rejected through their own perversity and malice, by others neglected

on account of their carelessness and dulness to their danger. And besides all those who would thus be lost to Him through their own fault, there would be others who would be deprived of the means of grace and reconciliation by external circumstances, caused by the unfaithfulness of those through whom they ought to receive guidance and help, as is the case with children who are allowed to die unbaptized. And then, still further, there would be but comparatively few who would reap the full benefit of all the grace which He had won and prepared for them. Each one of these various degrees of failure in His work would be an exquisite pang to our Lord's Heart, but most especially the case of those who would even be worse than they might have been if He had not died for them, because He thereby gave their malice the occasion of fresh outrages, by which they would trample His Blood under their feet, "crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making a mockery of Him."¹

As the Agony in the Garden was the most intensely painful part of our Lord's sufferings, being interior and not only external, and lasting on in its bitterness throughout the whole of the subsequent Passion, it called, more than any other of His torments, on the compassion of the one heart which could understand it, and which, being so full of the love of God for men, of the tenderest love for our Lord's Person and His Sacred Humanity, could share His pain to the very utmost. So that, if it be true that our Lord's own Heart broke under that interior strain, it may also be supposed that His

¹ Heb. vi. 6.

Mother's heart required some supernatural aid to keep it in life. It was now that she became to Him more than she was ever before by her sympathy and grief for Him, for it is in the time of sorrow that love is most loving, and compassion most tender and touching. Alas! the disciples were sleeping while our Lord was in all this tempest of woe, and as the Church makes Him say in her sacred services, Judas did not sleep, nor His enemies. Only Mary watched with Him during that hour of which He spoke, and her faithful heart was to Him at once a comfort, like the consolation which the Angel brought Him, and the cause of a fresh pang also, because she suffered so much for and with Him. When the time of prayer was over, and the armed band drew near, she would follow Him in heart as He roused His disciples, and went forth calmly to meet His enemies. She understood the power of His voice, pronouncing the Sacred Name of God, "I am He," which cast them to the ground. She followed His mercy to Malchus, His warning to St. Peter, His command to the crowd not to molest His disciples, and His remonstrance to the Scribes and Pharisees that they had come out against Him as if He were a thief, while they had never touched Him when He taught in the Temple in their midst. And then she felt with Him the pang when the disciples forsook Him and fled. There was no anger in His Heart, or in hers, but she prayed most earnestly for these poor frightened sheep, leaving their Shepherd in the hands of foes, and exposing themselves to a thousand unknown dangers by their abandonment of Him.

There are two things especially to be noted with regard to our Blessed Lady at this stage of the Passion. First, she had during the whole life of our Lord, frequently suffered great alarm and apprehension on account of the dangers which had beset His life from His enemies in various ways. The Infancy had given her many experiences of this kind, and during the Public Life there had been many occasions on which there had been great danger, as when the Nazarenes attempted to cast Him from the brow of the hill, or when the Herodians and Pharisees plotted together against His life, or when Herod himself imagined that He was St. John Baptist risen from the dead, or when the Priests in Jerusalem had sent their officers to apprehend Him, or taken up stones to cast at Him. On all these occasions, and perhaps on many more which have not been recorded for us, our Blessed Lady must have felt very great alarm and anguish at the dangers to His life. But now that the Passion had begun, "their hour," as our Lord said to them, "and the power of darkness," there was suffering of quite a new kind for the tender heart of Mary. For now for the first time, as far as we know, our Lord's Sacred Person was exposed to insult, outrage, contumely, ill-treatment of every kind. He was put in bonds, and dragged along by His captors, as if He had been some dangerous and hateful wild beast whom the hunters had mastered. In this treatment of Him by these savage soldiers she could see two things. It was not only pain and suffering and insult to which He was exposed. It was profanation and sacrilege. She felt as we should feel

if we saw the Blessed Sacrament trampled under foot, or profaned and outraged in some of those shocking ways in which there is but too good reason for thinking It has often been treated, even in our own day. This would be the cause of intense anguish to our Blessed Lady, and yet this suffering, which began now in the Garden of Gethesmani, was to constitute a very large part of the Cross which she was now to bear till the very moment when our Lord breathed out His Soul. Indeed, after that this Cross endured, for there was danger of this kind of profanation when the soldiers came prepared to break the legs of the crucified, when Longinus pierced the Sacred Side with his lance, and up to the very last, and until the Sacred Body was laid in honour in the Sepulchre. We may see in this intense suffering of our Blessed Lady a germ which was to increase to a mighty growth in her heart, and to spread from thence as the origin of many most noble sacrifices in the Church. This was the instinct and desire for repairing to our Lord, for the insults lavished upon Him by His enemies, by a more exact and faithful homage and worship than ever.

Another feature which now begins to make itself seen in the position of our Blessed Lady is that, as others fell away in various degrees and ways, from the desertion of Judas by his malignant betrayal to the weakness and cowardice of the Apostles which made them take to flight, our Lady remains more and more alone, the one instance of incomparable faithfulness and loyalty, of devotion and hope which nothing can shake. We do not know that the flight

of the Apostles involved more than this cowardice, the result of weakness in faith. The fault of Peter afterwards was soon repaired, perhaps after a few words of encouragement from our Blessed Lady herself. St. John was at all events able to take his stand at the foot of the Cross with our Lady and blessed Magdalene. There was no absolute failure, therefore, or none that was not soon repaired, among the Apostles, except in the case of the poor traitor Judas. But there was one whose heart was more grievously afflicted than the hearts of all others taken together, and yet she is the one whose faith and hope never failed at all, but were brightened and intensified by the whole series of woes of which the Passion consisted. She was in the Passion in the place of the whole Church, or rather the whole Church had taken refuge in her bosom. She was thus to give our Lord the homage and honour which she had always rendered to Him, and to give them now with a greater intensity of love than ever before because there was no other who could aid her in the discharge of this duty. She has kept in the background during the triumphs and conflicts of His Public Life, and now that the Passion is on Him, she comes forward most prominently in the eyes of the whole world to stand by His Cross when so few others are found by her side.

In this earliest stage of the Passion the friends of our Lord, if they did not understand, as His Mother did, the Divine and judicial character of the process which was to issue on Calvary, may have been continually feeding their hopes on some one or other of the many elements in the case which might

seem to make His murder impossible. It was, indeed, manifest that His judges had determined His ruin. This was proved, at once, in the house of Annas, when that veteran judge had shown the inconceivable unfairness of permitting our Lord to be violently cuffed in his presence by one of the attendants without punishing the offender. It was shown in the open attempts to convict our Lord by the subornation of false witnesses. But this device failed, and though our Lord made no answer to the charges against Him, because He came thus to be condemned, not because He was guilty of the charges, but because He had on Him the guilt of the whole world's sin, still there was no pretence for judgment against Him. He answered at last the adjuration of Caiphas, and this was made the ground of a new charge of blasphemy. But if the priests had condemned Him, there was still the Roman Governor, and the people themselves would have to be reckoned with, who were or had been devoted to Him. Pilate was averse to His condemnation. He got rid of the matter, as he thought, by a reference to Herod, and Herod found no cause of death in Him. Then the people had the right of freeing a prisoner at the feast, and why might they not free Him? All was in vain, for the cause which was being tried did not depend on human evidence, on the scruples of a judge, or on the favour of a mob. It depended on the justice of God, to which our Lord had surrendered Himself.

His Mother must have known this, and therefore she listened to no suggestion that might occur to her as to the possible issues of the matter on human

grounds. He was to suffer to the utmost, and she was to suffer with Him. She was not even to hear of what was passing from others, she was to witness the most atrocious and terrible of the chastisements, which He was to undergo, the one of which the Evangelists seem almost afraid to speak, except in the fewest words. The terrible cry of "Crucify Him!" had appalled the Roman Governor, and made him think if he could contrive to release our Lord by making Him an object of pity to His enemies. Pilate's half-measure of compassion for the Immaculate Lamb of God was nothing less than the Flagellation.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRÆTORIUM.

WE are of course without any direct guidance from the Evangelists as to the time at which our Blessed Lady left her retirement, in order to be present personally, as far as was possible for her, at the sufferings of her Divine Son. That it was the will of God, for many most sublime reasons, that she should be so present, is certain from the Gospel of St. John, and there can only be a question as to the point in the history at which her companionship in this way with our Lord began. It seems, however, reasonable to follow what is the common belief of contemplatives in this matter, and what is also in itself the most reasonable conjecture. This is, that our Blessed Lady joined our Lord about the time of His passing through the streets on His way either to or from the palace of Herod, and that she continued to witness a great part of what He endured and did from that time to the Crucifixion itself, and afterwards to the end. The portions of this time when she could not have been actually present may have been those which He spent, almost alone, with Pilate in His conversation with that official.

Our Blessed Lady's companionship must have been both consoling and painful to our Lord, as has been said. For if He derived comfort from the

witness of her incomparable faithfulness, and the unwearied activity with which she followed every phase of His sufferings, He must also have been most tenderly pained by the sorrow which her grief caused Him, founded in the main on the consciousness that her sorrow came from seeing Him suffer, and from her wonderful knowledge as to the reasons and the measure of His sufferings. But we need hardly say how much of glory to God and honour to our Lord was produced by her Compassion, nor how fruitful it must have been to her own soul, nor how beneficial to others in the increase which it brought about of her power in intercession for them. It must always be remembered that the whole life of this Blessed Mother was divinely arranged so that she might have all possible opportunities of advancing ever higher and higher in grace, and that no stage of her whole life could be so important, under this aspect, as that with which we are now concerned. At the very end of the Passion she was to be crowned for her incomparable fidelity and her enormous sufferings with that full motherly power over all the children of our Lord which is the highest of her privileges and the most fruitful of blessings to us. This was the great work of God in Mary which was being so rapidly carried on to its consummation during these few last hours of our Lord's Life, which were to her occasions of grace such as she had never met with before. Our Lord said to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into His glory?"¹ And it may be said in like manner of

¹ St. Luke xxiv. 26.

Mary, "Ought not the Mother of God to have suffered these things, and so to enter into that glory of hers which is second only to that of her Son?" There can be no comparison between the rapidity of her advance in grace and perfection now, and its rapidity at any other time. We marvel at the height of grace to which, almost in a few minutes, the penitent thief was raised. But the Passion was a time in which everything of this kind was matured almost in an instant.

The presence of our Lady was now required, in the sense in which we speak, at that suffering of our Lord which has a character of its own of the deepest shamefulness, and of which it is difficult to find words in which to speak adequately. And if her presence at any one of the many insults and torments which He had to undergo must have added to His pain in an almost inconceivable degree, much more must this have been the case with His most painful and shameful Flagellation, in which not only was His Sacred Flesh torn to pieces and His Body made one great mass of wounds, but, still more, His virginal modesty and the sacred dignity of His Person were subject to the most brutal outrage, even by their simple exposure to the gaze of the crowds of both sexes who were the spectators of this profanation. It is a thing of which, as has been said, the Evangelists seem afraid to speak, and when we consider the extreme brutality of our Lord's enemies, and their diabolical delight in exposing Him to every imaginable insult, gloating, for that purpose, over every such triumph of malice, it may well be supposed that in none even of the revelations

which remain to us on this subject have we the full tale of this suffering in honour to which our Lord was now exposed in the sight of His Mother. St. Bridget tells us that He was left absolutely without the slightest covering, till a spectator darted from the crowd to supply what decency required. And we are also told that His clothes were maliciously taken away and hidden, so that He had a difficulty in finding them when the scourging itself was over. It was to this, besides all that pain, that the Incarnate God submitted. It was this that His Blessed Mother was now to witness.

It has been already said that Mary would never lose sight of the judicial character of the Passion, and of each one of its details. The multiplicity and variety of our Lord's sufferings represented to her the multitude and the variety of the sins for which they were inflicted. With this thought in our minds, it is easy to understand what chastisement it was which was now being inflicted on the Purest of the Pure, on the fountain and source of Purity, under the eyes of His most chaste Mother. It was the sin which, more than any other, is said to people Hell with hundreds of souls day after day, the sin which under various forms brought down the uncontrollable anger of God in the Deluge and in the destruction of the Cities of the Plain, the sin which the Apostles found so rampant all over the heathen world that they were obliged to proscribe it as if its heinousness was a new revelation, and to add its denunciation in Epistles written to Churches which were rich in spiritual gifts. It is the sin which in the pagan days presented itself to the eyes, the ears,

the imagination, on every side, painted on the walls, celebrated by the poets, rehearsed and taught in the theatres, entering into every conversation, worshipped on the altars, while the pollutions which it wrought in the heart were too great, too universal, too foul, to be accounted for even by these means of propagation. It is the sin which it is the great aim and tendency of modern fashions and customs, not to revive, for it has never died, but to intensify and spread more and more widely in Christian society. For it is in the prevalence of this sin, with all its degrading and blinding and hardening power, that the best hope of Satan lies for the destruction of souls, and the fashions and customs of the world are always under the control of its Prince. It is the sin in which men make themselves lower than the animals, who follow the instincts of appetite without defiling an intelligent nature, made for the contemplation of God, by the pollution of imagination and the filthiness of thought and desire.

It is this sin for the exclusion of which from the hearts of His redeemed and from the society into which He has formed them, our Lord chose to be born of a Virgin, and to give us His own most pure Mother to be the Patron and Queen of our homes and of our hearts. There is thus in the position of our Lady at the Flagellation at once an intensity of suffering, and a Divine fitness in that suffering, which are nowhere more conspicuous. And we learn from it both how to measure the love which could submit to so much for the expiation of our sins, and the immense power of help against such degradation which is stored up for us in the heart of Mary. If

there were no other reason for exerting ourselves to the utmost to increase the honour of and devotion to our Blessed Lady among Christians, this would be enough and more than enough for spending lives in such exertions, that Providence has placed in that honour and that devotion so singular and powerful a remedy against an evil which spares nothing that is innocent, nothing that is naturally fair and beautiful, an evil that desolates homes, poisons friendships, degrades intellects, dissolves society, an evil which no civilization can shut out, no refinement or cultivation palliate, which arms man against his own peace, his own honour, his own dignity, which corrupts the whole world, and gives its greatest triumphs to Hell.

We may see from this that the incident of the Scourging of our Lord, which seems to have suggested itself to Pilate and to have been adopted without any great amount of deliberation, was not, in the Providential order of the Passion, anything accidental. It had been dwelt on especially in the later predictions of our Lord to the Apostles, though not when He had just warned them of the approach of the Passion.² In truth, it seems to have been a Roman punishment, far more severe than what was inflicted by the Jews, and was a preparation for Crucifixion. The Jewish rulers had set their hearts upon bringing about our Lord's death by the way of the Cross, probably on account of its great infamy, which would make His name hateful and despicable, and perhaps their anticipations, on this score, included also the Scourging. And God was working

² See St. Matt. xx. 19; St. Mark x. 33, 34; St. Luke xviii. 32.

out in this way, by means of their malignity and of the heedless cowardice of Pilate, who almost thought he was doing our Lord a service by means of which His life might be spared, the decrees of His own justice for the expiation of the most prevalent and most degrading of sins. Nor was the presence of our Blessed Lady at the Flagellation without its Divine purpose. It is natural to ask whether anything of the same kind may be said with regard to the torment which followed immediately on the Scourging, that is, the mocking and crowning with thorns. Those who see in each one of these particular sufferings of our Lord the chastisement of some one class of corresponding sins in men, find in this part of our Lord's humiliation the expiation of sins of pride and vanity and ambition, the aspiring to royal honour, worldly dominion and rule. In this way the humblest of all the saints—for humility was the special virtue of our Lady, as of her Son—was allowed to witness the insults and outrages vented on our Lord on this account. But there is yet another aspect of this part of the Passion, on which it may be worth while to dwell for a few moments.

It has already been noticed that, all through the Passion, there is a constant recurrence of incidents which point to the truth of our Lord's kingly dignity. It was for being a King that He was really condemned by Pilate, out of fear of the Roman Emperor, and the Governor bore witness to this truth in the title which he wrote for the Cross. Our Lord would never deny to Pilate that He was King, as to the Chief Priests He would not deny that He was God. It would appear that it was the decree of Providence

that He should suffer something especially on this account, as in His Scourging He had suffered most severely on account of the doctrine and example of purity which He had preached and set, and which was so hateful to the world at large. The purple robe, the crown of thorns, the reed placed in His hands for a sceptre, and all the mockery and all the insults to which He was now exposed, may be looked on as the manifestations of the fury of the world against this doctrine of the royalty of Christ and of the Church, a doctrine in which the salvation of society as such is wrapped up, as much as all personal holiness and sanctity are enfolded in the doctrine of purity. The Scourging was the rage of sensual human nature, stirred up by Satan, against the purity of our Lord and of His children, and permitted by God as the expiation of the immense evils of sensuality. The Crowning with Thorns, with all its accompanying horrors, is the savage anger of the spirit of the world let loose upon the royalty of Jesus Christ, allowed for the expiation of the sins of ambition and worldliness which have made the social and political condition of mankind so entirely different from what they might have been if His sceptre had been accepted instead of rejected. Mary is Queen where He is King. She is the Help of Christians, the Defence of Christendom, the Guardian of the Holy See, the protector of the supernatural order of society, and because she was to be these, she was in her right place in witnessing, as far as she did witness, these outrages in the Prætorium of Pilate.

The remainder of the incidents which preceded the actual beginning of the Way of the Cross must

have struck on our Blessed Lady's heart with terrible pain—the defeat of Pilate's desire for the liberation of our Lord by means of the compassion of His enemies, the horrible cries after the *Ecce Homo*, the charge of making Himself the Son of God, which frightened the Governor, then the last dialogue between him and our Lord, which seems to have determined him to set Him free, and last of all, his yielding to the fear of Tiberius. "If thou release this Man thou art not Cæsar's friend, for every one who maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar." And the Priests answered at last, "We have no king but Cæsar," thus shamefully denying all the best hopes and privileges of their nation. Perhaps after the tender compassion with which the sorrow of our Lord would strike on the heart of His Mother, the point which is most prominent in this part of the scene is the national sin of which the Jews now made themselves guilty, and its terrible consequences in this world as well as in the next. This was a part of the Providential decree of the Passion, that it was to destroy, through their own act, the exclusive rights, such as they were, of the Jews, make them liable to the most fearful national chastisement, and transfer the Kingdom of God to the Gentiles. The execution of this sentence had formed a part of the great prophecy of the Weeks of Daniel, who had said, "And the people that shall deny Him shall not be His."³ It had been more than once spoken of by our Lord in the Parables, especially in one of the last He delivered, that of the Wicked Husbandmen.

3 Daniel ix. 26.

The Chief Priests had made the accusation against Him of being a King, for the sake of inducing Pilate to be more ready to listen to their request for His Death, and in this they had deliberately changed the subject-matter of the charge on which they had themselves judicially condemned Him. It was that new charge which practically brought about the final consent of Pilate. But, what is more, by that Providential change of the accusation, which was contrary to all justice and truth, the idea of our Lord's kingly character was suggested to Pilate, and led to his interrogation of his Prisoner on that particular subject. It led also to the taunt of Pilate against the Priests and the people about crucifying their King. It led to our Lord's rejection by them in favour of Barabbas. It was in itself so palpably absurd to outward eye, that it showed Pilate the real motives of the Priests, and so helped to convince him of our Lord's innocence. This again was the reason for his washing his hands before the people, and declaring himself innocent of the Blood which they were forcing him to shed. This action drew from the people their fearful imprecation of the guilt of that Blood on themselves and on their children. Thus by the Providence of God, the whole nation, both rulers and people, were solemnly associated by their own act in the crime of the murder of our Lord, and the sentence was at once incurred which was first executed in the destruction of their city and nation by the Romans, and is still weighing upon them till the end of time. We shall find that it was in the thoughts of our Lord on the way to Calvary, for He spoke of it in

His words to the daughters of Jerusalem. Since this was so, it is natural to think that this whole judicial process, whereby the sentence of rejection was incurred by the whole nation, was a matter on which the thoughts of His Blessed Mother were closely fixed. When Pilate pronounced the sentence by which our Lord was to suffer, the sentence of the condemnation and chastisement of the Jewish nation was passed in Heaven.

This was one of the momentous issues of the Passion as to which no one but our Blessed Lady could keep company with the thoughts and affections of our Lord. It is a part of the Providential government of the world, which is too often forgotten, that God deals with nations and communities and families as wholes, as having a continuous life and as inheriting responsibilities to His Justice from generation to generation. They do not survive in the next world, as the souls of whom they are made up survive, and the dealings of God with them have to be accomplished in chastisements and in rewards, within the time which the history of this world is to cover. Again, it is never to be forgotten that individuals cannot altogether separate themselves from the acts of the body and the moral consequences of those acts. Nay, it often happens that a generation comparatively innocent in a family or in a nation, is the generation chosen by God to suffer for the sins the penalties of which they inherit. There are many other points of the same kind which might be drawn out if it were to the purpose here, with relation to national crimes and their punishment. But it is enough to say that

this must have been one of those subjects on which our Blessed Lady's intelligence was wonderfully enlightened. Whether she knew or not, by any supernatural intimation, that the rejection of the Jews involved the fulfilment of all the glorious prophecies which spoke of the reign of our Lord over the Gentiles, we cannot tell. At the present moment, her chief thought may well have been that of the loss of her own people, and, while she adored in silence the Divine decrees in their regard, she must have mourned most deeply over the sin which brought down the chastisement of forfeiture upon them. It was this thought which afflicted our Lord so much when He wept over Jerusalem on the Day of Palms, and which also grieved Him so much on His path of Calvary. The heart of His Blessed Mother must have shared in both cases in the intensity of His sorrow.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WAY OF SORROWS.

THE final condemnation of our Lord by Pilate seems to have taken place some time before noon. The space of time must have been long enough to allow of the procession to Calvary before the sixth hour arrived, as it was still nominally the third hour, that is, within the time between nine and twelve, when the Crucifixion was accomplished. The distance from the Prætorium to Calvary is not great, but it must be supposed that such a procession would move on slowly, and in this case the narrow streets were thronged with people. Also, the great bodily weakness of our Lord, under the weight of the Cross, made Him fall many times, and it was necessary to force Simon the Cyrenian to help Him, if He was to arrive alive at the place of execution. The line of this most sacred way has been preserved to us by tradition, and it is natural to think that it was one of our Blessed Lady's special devotions, during the time of her residence in Jerusalem after the Ascension, to venerate every single spot thus hallowed by the footsteps of our Lord, and especially the Way of the Cross. This devotion was brought from the East, apparently, by the Franciscans, and has taken, as was natural, a very great hold on the

affections of the Christian people. Even if it could be doubted that the various "Stations" are authenticated by genuine tradition, there would still be nothing in this devotion to which any reasonable objection could be made. All the incidents which are not directly mentioned by the Gospels are in themselves such as were certain to occur, the only exception being the beautiful anecdote of the Veronica, which rests on a traditional basis of its own. It will not be necessary here to go through the whole story of the Way of Sorrows, as our subject confines us, in the main, to the companionship of our Blessed Lady with her Divine Son. She was, as it seems, near at hand, and witnessed the departure from the Prætorium, which was made with a certain amount of pomp and solemnity, and with an escort of soldiers under a centurion, while the people thronged on every side, the news having spread rapidly through the city. It seems likely that here also the Chief Priests, in their triumph, forgot all the decency and gravity of their character, and showed themselves prominently, for the greater insult to our Lord.

Our Lord was now again clothed in His own garments, probably at the instance of the priests, who wished Him to be presented to the people in His usual dress, that He might be the more easily recognized. Thus it came about in the Passion that He was several times stripped in the eyes of the crowd, and each of these occasions was a great outrage on His modesty and dignity, as well as a time of fresh pain, because the garments which He had to lay aside were fastened by His Blood to the wounds with which He was now covered. His loss

of blood had already been very great, and it was thus continually increased. The very stones and mire of the street were covered with His Blood. When His Cross was brought to Him, the saints tell us that He broke out into a rapturous welcome of that long desired instrument of His sacrifice, whether in words or in heart. His martyrs, such as St. Andrew, have often done this, but no one with so much intensity of love as our Lord Himself. His Heart was full of the desire of which He had once spoken to His Apostles, and it may be of this moment, in particular, that St. Paul says, "That having joy set before Him, He endured the Cross, despising the shame."¹

We must consider that in the same way, our Blessed Lady's heart was full of the great issues which were to be accomplished by the Passion, and so far she could grasp them with a longing desire, in union with our Lord, though this hope and prospect did not dull the pain either in His case or in hers. It was her business to be with Him, to follow His thoughts and sufferings, to give Him the "bitter-sweet" consolation of her faithful presence, of witnessing her peace and union with the will of God under all the storm of sorrows, to rejoice Him by the boundless perfection of the graces which she exercised at every moment. Some devout souls consider, also, that her prayers were allowed to obtain for Him the omission of some of the insults which Satan, or the servants of Satan, were continually devising for Him, when there was any extreme indignity contained in them to which there

¹ Heb. xii. 2.

was no need that He should be exposed. Thus this passage through the streets, both to Him and to her, was at once a solemn triumph, because it led to His mounting the throne of the Cross from which His Kingdom was to begin, and the most intense suffering, on account of the extreme pain which now gave Him no rest in His weakness, His thirst, His weariness, the torture of the wounds clinging to His vestments, the thorns piercing His Head, the burthen of the Cross which soon wore a great wound in His shoulder, the unsteadiness of His steps which made Him totter and fall, and strike His Head against the Cross from time to time, and, all the while, the jeers and insults of His enemies, the mockings of the people, and, worse than all, the continually fresh sins which added to the weight of His pain and the sorrow of His Heart. In all these causes, whether of pain or of consolation, Mary's heart beat in perfect union with His.


The incidents of the Way of Sorrows, as they are arranged in accordance with the tradition as to the several Stations, fall easily into three groups unequal in number. Our Lord had already fallen once under the weight of the Cross when He met His Blessed Mother. This most touching incident is placed after this first fall, and it is accompanied or followed by the two other anecdotes of the Veronica and of the assistance given by Simon of Cyrene. After this, the procession went on its way again, and the words addressed by our Lord to the daughters of Jerusalem are placed before the third and last fall, which seems to have happened on the arrival at the summit of Calvary. The remaining

Stations follow in their natural order, the stripping of our Lord, the Crucifixion, the death on the Cross, the deposition, and the placing of the Sacred Body in the sepulchre.

The point at which our Lord met His Blessed Mother may have been some spot at which the road widened, or perhaps the procession had paused after His first grievous fall, and thus our Lady was able to gain somewhat on the little crowd of officers and executioners immediately around Him. This meeting, the memory of which has been preserved to us by tradition, must not be supposed to imply that our Lady now for the first time became present at the sufferings of her Son, or that He was now for the first time aware of her presence. We have supposed her to have been an eye-witness of a large part of the Passion before this point, and it is not likely that He did not advert to her being so near to Him. But it was perhaps the first time at which she approached Him so near as to be able to exchange looks, if not words and embraces, to throw herself at His feet, and give Him the consolation of the expression of her most tender and faithful love. Or it may have been that, as the actual execution of the sentence passed upon Him had now begun, it was fitting in the designs of Providence that they should exchange a few solemn words of leavetaking, that He should give her His last blessing, and that she should for the last time profess her devotion. There would be no time for this on Calvary, at least while He hung on the Cross nothing could pass between them which others might not hear.

This meeting, then, summed up, as it were, the

companionship of our Lady with her Son. They had time to gaze on one another, each to see in the other the traces of the terrible sufferings which had been already inflicted on them, and thus she would be able to drink in, as it were, the whole of the chalice of pain which His sufferings had been preparing for her, while she would also present herself to His eyes as the victim of the compassion which it was her place to render to Him. A terrible sight indeed to the Sacred Heart, and an immense addition to the weight of the Cross which He was bearing. For His eye alone could fully trace out in her soul and heart all the interior tortures to which she had been subjected, and which had not availed, though felt by her with the keenest sensitiveness, to make her repine or complain, or indulge in a thought or a desire at variance with the will of God. The whole of the tenderness of her soul was laid bare before Him, and at the same time that most marvellous work of grace which had been going on during the last few hours, a multiplication and intensification of supernatural gifts to which there had been no parallel even in her own most rapid advances in sanctity. And to her, who can conceive what it must have been? To look into His eyes darkened with blood, to see His most lovely Face besmeared with foul spittings or with the blood flowing from the wounds in His Head, His mouth all parched with thirst and half choked with congealed blood, His knees trembling under Him, His arms marked with the rents made by the scourging, His whole Body, indeed, one great wound, and to notice the faintness of death, as it seemed, already creeping over His whole frame, livid



with blows and unnaturally white from the exhaustion of His veins! That indeed was a last blow to the heart of the Mother, which might have slain her life at once, but for the Divine support, and that last loving moment of companionship, in the intensity of its pain, might well seem enough to give the final crown to the merits of the Compassion, which were to be so wonderfully rewarded when our Lord came to speak His last words on the Cross.

Of the Stations which precede the actual Crucifixion, that one which reveals to us most of the interior of our Lord at this time must of course be that which commemorates His gentle words to the daughters of Jerusalem. They were lamenting, as women would naturally lament, His own hard case, the sufferings He had already endured, the sufferings which He was yet to undergo, His early Death, and the like. There may have been some among them who understood the dignity of His Person, and all must have at least heard of the holiness and boundless beneficence of His Life. But the mere sight of Him in His actual state would have been enough to move the hardest heart, even if they had not known Who He was or what He had done. It seems to have been our Lord's intention to raise them from simple unprofitable pity of His own intense sufferings, which were infinitely meritorious and faithful in the eyes of God, to a serious compunction of heart for the great national sin which had been committed, and which was to be visited on them and on their children, and which, as it had not yet fallen on them in vengeance, was a fit matter for prayer, by which the guilt at least might be in some degree effaced, their

own souls freed from participation therein, and perhaps the chastisement made less severe in the case of particular persons. Our Lord set before them in plain words the Divine punishment which was imminent, the thought of which might make them enter into themselves, and prepare themselves for it by contrition and supplication. It seems natural to think that our Blessed Lady's heart was already occupied with the thoughts and prayers now suggested to those weeping women by our Lord, and that she read in the extreme severity of the chastisement which was inflicted on the Immaculate Lamb of God Himself, a lesson which set before her how far more terrible must be the chastisement to be inflicted on sinners, who would be to the fire of the Divine wrath as dry wood already fit for the burning, in comparison to the green wood which could only be burnt with difficulty. For our Lord had in Himself nothing that could be the fit fuel for such anger, and yet with all His innocence He was made to suffer so severely, as if to teach us what will be the measure of God's angry vengeance when it falls upon them to whom it is justly due.

The process of the Crucifixion itself was full of barbarity and savage outrage, for our Lord's wounds were again opened when His robes were torn off, the Crown of Thorns left on His Head while He was being nailed to the Cross must have caused a great aggravation of torture, and it seems that there was a brutal and needless infliction of pain when His arms were stretched out, beyond their natural span, in order that the Hands might be fastened by the nails at the places where the Cross had been

pierced to receive them. There again came that refinement of insult, which left Him for a time without the slightest covering in the sight of all the crowd, and, as soon as the Cross was settled in its socket, and our Lord raised up so as to be seen by all, the mockings and revilings and blasphemies began again on all sides, so as to make it almost intolerable for our Lady and St. John to stand and listen to them in silence.

Many, no doubt, of those who mocked and jeered were men who knew no better, and only indulged the ordinary savagery of their disposition in the taunts which they threw at Him. But there were graver persons there, the Priests of the Temple, the Scribes learned in the law, the Pharisees with their broad phylacteries, and these men did not fail to make themselves very conspicuous in their triumphant insults to Him, and as He hung upon the Cross His very deeds of mercy were thrown in His teeth. "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." He was invited to come down from the Cross, and they would believe in Him. The soldiers joined, the passers-by joined, the thieves by His side on their crosses, or one of them, joined. And His Mother and His friends were to stand there, and listen in silence, as He listened in silence! Thus it may be that the unwearied malice of His enemies would have left no moment of all the three hours which were yet to elapse before He was to breathe out His Soul, without some fresh insult or blasphemy. But nature spoke in its own way in His defence, and imposed on them all an awful silence, under which the loudest voices died away and the

boldest hearts quailed with fear. It was mid-day, and yet the sunlight began to fail. Rapidly the darkness spread over the whole land, bringing with it a fearful hush, and a sense of the anger of God, against which even men like Annas and Caiphas could no longer hold up their heads. The Maker of the world hung upon the Cross, and the physical universe itself was wrapt in the shroud of mourning. The last three hours, except just at their beginning, were to be passed in darkness and mainly in silence, while the most wonderful mysteries were being worked out to their accomplishment, in accordance with the decrees of God.

CHAPTER VII.

MARY ON CALVARY.

THE last three hours of the earthly Life of our Lord were the most solemn of any that He spent in this world before His Death. The active agents in His Passion retired, as the darkness drew on, and there was at last great quiet and calm silence around the Cross. The earliest of the Seven Words may have been spoken soon after the Crucifixion had been accomplished. Indeed the Evangelist seems almost to speak of the First Word as if it had been uttered while the process of the Crucifixion was going on. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,"¹ or what they are doing. We must allow some space of time after the Cross had been fixed in its socket, for the outburst of the mockeries and jeers from the Chief Priests and the crowd and the passers by, as also for the division of the garments and the fulfilment of the prophecies thereby. But St. Luke puts the first Word before the division of the garments. The second Word, also, may have come early, for the reproaches of the impenitent thief seem to have been suggested by the mockings of the crowd. It is also probable that the title was fixed on the Cross after our Lord had been fastened

¹ St. Luke xxiii. 34.

to it, and the Chief Priests must have had some time to read it and to make their complaint to Pilate concerning it. These things, therefore, may have taken place while the darkness was growing deeper and deeper, and then there may have been silence, broken only by the words which passed between the soldiers as they watched our Lord, until the time came for the third Word.

We are not now attempting a complete commentary on the incidents of the Passion, and we must pass on rapidly, even from the consideration of these wonderful sayings of our Lord on the Cross. Every Word of the Saviour of the world on His throne of suffering must be considered as fraught with meanings of immense depth and sacramental import. This is a general principle in the interpretation of these words. We must confine ourselves to those aspects of the whole which concern more immediately our Blessed Lady. Every thing, indeed, that happened must have concerned her in the fulfilment of the office of which we have so often spoken, of following as closely as possible the thoughts and affections, as well as the actions and sufferings, of her Divine Son, and in this respect all the incidents on Calvary must have struck her most deeply. She must have been the first to note the fulfilment of the prophecies with regard to the raiment which was divided, and the seamless robe for which lots were cast, that it might not be torn. It must have pained her deeply to see these relics of our Lord touched by hands so unworthy of them, and in the possession of persons so ignorant of their priceless value and sacred character. But at the same time the exact

carrying out of the words of the prophecy was to her a subject of the tenderest thanksgiving.

The title was another subject of contemplation for her. It was in one way the fulfilment of the promise first made to her by St. Gabriel at the Annunciation, that the Lord God would give unto her Son the throne of His father David. She had noted all through the manner in which His royal dignity was perpetually brought forward in the arrangements of Providence. Through the taunts and jests of the unworthy priests and the rude people she could see the Divine decrees which were securing the salvation of the world by the very apparent helplessness and weakness of Him Who was asked to come down from the Cross and receive their faith and allegiance, Who was said to have saved others but not to be able to save Himself, while if He had chosen to save Himself, as they said, they would have been left without any chance of salvation. Her prayers would rise for all, but most perhaps for the priests and for the poor thieves crucified by His side, blessed indeed in such a favour if they could but learn to understand their privilege. The contemplatives attribute the conversion of the one to the prayers of Mary. And certain it is that she, who was always so full of charity and so much on the look out for subjects for her intercessions, must have prayed especially for those in such a position as this.

As the silence came on with the increasing darkness, it is natural to think that our Blessed Lady must have set herself to ponder most deeply the Words which fell from our Lord's lips one after the other. The two first Words, which have been already men-

tioned, were full of the most Divine charity and of the largest munificence and bountifulness. Our Lord said nothing by way of complaint, He uttered no expression of pain. His thought was first for the spiritual and moral miseries of the poor men who were or had been engaged in fastening Him to the Cross, and in otherwise insulting Him and putting Him to unnecessary torture. It was for these that He first broke silence, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." There was this excuse to be made for them, although with regard to many of those concerned in His Passion the words could not apply so fully as to others. The Chief Priests had had many and great opportunities of knowing what they were doing when they contrived His Death, and He Himself had said of them that they had both seen and hated both Himself and His Father.² Still there were things about the Passion as to which they certainly did not understand what they were doing, and His loving Heart fastens on these and makes them the ground of His pleading for them to the Father, Whose wrath they were provoking to the uttermost. He uses the loving word Father, which He had not often used in the course of the Passion, because He was at that time Himself under the wrath of the Father for the sins which He had taken on Himself to expiate. But He speaks now as with power and right, as having it as His privilege to plead for those to whom He might wish the merits and fruits of His Passion to be applied, and thus it is an expression of a wish, and not simply a prayer in which He begs the

² St. John xv. 24.

boon for His enemies on the ground of their ignorance.

This Word must have presented to the mind of the Blessed Mother at the foot of the Cross a large measure indeed of mercy. For there is no limit in the petition, and as far as its words are concerned, they embrace the whole multitude of those who have had any share in the bringing Him there. The limit can only be found where there is no ignorance that can shield them, or, what is far more dangerous, where there is in themselves that determined obstinacy of heart which will not open the door to the grace when it knocks thereat. But in the intention of our Lord and in the mercy of the Father which this petition was to set in motion, there is absolutely no limit, and thus within the range of this mercy might have been found the High Priests themselves, or the traitor Judas, if he had not already placed himself beyond the reach of mercy, there might have been found the false witnesses, and the soldiers who had scourged Him savagely and mocked Him in the Prætorium, and the fickle people who had called for the liberation of Barabbas, and who cried out, "Away with Him! Crucify Him!" Thus our Lord's first speech on the Cross would open to our Lady the boundless treasures of His loving mercy, at the time when He might have been expected to speak rather in judgment or in remonstrance, for the very great and fresh provocation which their treatment of Him on the Sorrowful Way might naturally call for. What might He not have in His Heart to give to His friends, if He had so large a measure of bounty for His enemies? And the words may per-

haps be understood as implying that it might be made a kind of merit in these enemies that, without knowing it, they were bringing about the execution of the Divine decrees, which involved so much of endless glory to the Father, of honour to our Lord, and of good to mankind. Unwittingly they were contributing to the accomplishment of the great design of wisdom and mercy, and so it might be a part of His royal bountifulness to let them have their share in the fruits of that counsel.

The words of the thief on the cross may, as has been said, have been primarily suggested by the revilings and jeers of the scribes and priests who stood and mocked at the sufferings of our Lord. For such insults and barbarities have a natural way of propagating themselves, of being caught up by one person after another, and so when the passers by joined the priests, and the soldiers also took part in the reviling, the poor suffering thieves by His side may have been tempted to take their part also in the insults. One at least did so, and we are not obliged, by the words of the Evangelists, to think it certain that the other joined him. Mary was there at the foot of the Cross, praying, as was her wont, for those before her who were in the greatest need, and no one could be in greater need than these fellow-sufferers of our Lord, because their time could not be long, their blessed opportunity would soon pass away. Was there to be no victory of grace at this solemn time? Was our Lord really to pass away on the Cross, with no voice lifted in His defence and in confession of His innocence and of His dignity? Surely if this had been so, the stones

would have cried out. And so from the very cross by His side, amid the deepening gloom of the advancing darkness, there came forth that clear faint voice, first rebuking with great charity the other sufferer, "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this Man hath done no evil." And then the charity and faith of this rebuke swelled up still higher, to the level of a great act of hope and a great and full confession of the truth which was being trampled under foot by the whole world, to a loving and confident prayer, not for any specified boon of pardon or of deliverance, but simply that our Lord when He came into His Kingdom, would remember the little service that had been done to His honour. "Lord, remember me, when Thou shalt come into Thy Kingdom!"

If St. John, or our Lady herself, or one of the disciples, had raised a voice in defence of our Lord on this occasion, it might have been said that they were His friends and bound to speak for Him, and their witness would not have been so precious to the Sacred Heart nor so efficacious in the eyes of the world as this witness of the dying thief. Even criminals are listened to with respect when they speak from their place of punishment, and with the dews of death gathering on their brow, and this man, as far as he spoke for himself and for his companion, spoke nothing that could not be acknowledged by all who heard him as true. It was different when he turned to our Lord and made his wonderful confession, for in that was included

a perfect Christian faith in our Lord as God and as King, in the certain advent of His Kingdom, and of His power to reward any service rendered to Him. This confession was made at the time when He was hanging on the Cross, and when His enemies were jeering at His apparent want of power to help or to save Himself. Moreover, the petition is made in the humblest and most modest way, not as if he had done any great service or might claim any striking reward. He only asks our Lord to remember him, and the request implies that the mere thought of him by our Lord was enough, and was certain to carry with it an abundance of relief and recompence. The consolation which this humble prayer and confession would have furnished to the heart of our Lady must have been boundless, and it must have conveyed also the assurance that the grace of the Crucifixion was already at work, that our Lord had begun to exercise, from the wood of the Cross, His royal and sovereign authority.

But there was still more occasion for wonderment and for rejoicing, when the answer from our Lord to the petition of the thief revealed once more the magnificence and lavish liberality of His giving, now that He was thus lifted up on His throne. The thief had asked merely that our Lord would remember him. It is one of the arts of prayer, which the servants of God learn by practice, in dealing with God in this way, not to dictate to Him, as it were, not to point out precisely what we think best, but to trust to His wisdom, in choosing His own boon, as well as to His liberality in giving us any boon. When our Lady brought about the first

great miracle, she only said, "They have no wine." When the sisters of Lazarus desired our Lord's help for their brother, they only said, "He whom Thou lovest is sick." So now the thief, as if he were well acquainted with our Lord's ways, only says, "Lord, remember me." Thus the reward for his confession was to be measured rather by the bountiful instincts of the Sacred Heart than by the feeble hopes or merits of the humble petitioner by His side.

Dismas had said, "Remember me, Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom," speaking of a time which to his mind was probably in the distant future, content to wait till then, in the hope that then at least some kind of deliverance might come. But the Sacred Heart could brook of no delay, and the boon was not to be a mere remembrance, but the highest boon that could then be given, the boon that was to be given in a few short hours to the most exalted of His saints in the next world. "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." For what more could be said of Joseph or John Baptist, or the most favoured of the ancient saints, than that that day they should be with our Lord in Paradise? For where our Lord was, there would be Paradise, although as yet Heaven could not be opened, nor the general resurrection anticipated. This poor sufferer, who had hung for a short space of time on the cross by the side of the Son of God, who had just made his short but perfect confession, exercised the duty of charity to his brother thief, and declared before Heaven and earth his faith in the innocence of our

Lord, in His royal dignity and in the Divinity of His Person, was to receive no less a gift than this of sharing immediately in the bliss of Paradise, by the side of Him. The merit of his confession, together with his patient suffering, was to cancel at once the guilt of all his sins and all the pain due to them, it was to deliver him from any detention in Purgatory, it was to make him pass at once from the cross as soon as he had breathed his last to the abode of the blessed now made into Paradise by the presence of our Lord. But far above all, it was to make him our Lord's companion in glory, as he had been in suffering and shame. "Thou shalt be with Me!" that was the essence of the blessing. If such was the reward of a single confession under such circumstances, what might not be expected from a liberality magnificent for those who had suffered long and patiently for our Lord?

In truth there may, perhaps, be a certain intentional advance in the three first Words from the Cross, which may help us to understand them better. It is something more to have the promise of Paradise immediately, than to have the prayer made to the Father that the sin of participation in the Crucifixion may be forgiven, on the allegation of their ignorance. That was a splendid boon from our Lord to His murderers, but it did not secure their salvation or open to them the gates of Paradise. But if the murderers were to be signally favoured, from the pure benevolence and charity of the Saviour of the world towards them, because it behoved Him always to show Himself a Saviour, and He could never show Himself more

completely such than by applying the fruit of His copious redemption to them in the very act of His Crucifixion, it was fitting that the one faithful voice which had been lifted up in vindication of His innocence and in confession of His dignity, should have a still more splendid recompence than that which was bestowed on His murderers, that the gift for him should be greater than the mercy to them, as his service had been rendered when it could so little have been expected, and with the risk of bringing down on the courageous soul who made the protest some aggravation of his torments, or at least the reproaches and revilings of the world. We are here in the realm of immense and most magnificent bounties and mercies, and the whole character of our Lord's demeanour is so far changed. He is no longer silent and patient and meek in the hands of His enemies, like a criminal who feels that he is suffering what he has brought on himself. He speaks and acts like a Conqueror and a Sovereign, Who has made His triumph certain and can allot the fruits of His victory at His pleasure, to those who have deserved well of Him, or put Him under some obligation which is recognized by His most grateful Heart. Thus these two first Words prepare us gradually for the third.

Before we leave them, we may note one thing more which characterizes them, and which will help us to fix with greater certainty the meaning of the Word which is to follow. The boons granted or asked for the thief and for the executioners of our Lord, are applications of the merits of the Passion which was now being accomplished. The pardon

asked for the enemies was a fruit of the Passion. The reward promised to the penitent thief was also a fruit of the Passion. The accomplishment of the great Sacrifice of Himself unlocked, so to say, the treasures of the mercies of our Lord, and gave Him the right as well as the inclination to empty His love upon those who were now the objects of His special pity or gratitude. With this thought in our minds we may go on to the consideration of the third Word from the Cross, which is that which above all others has a special interest for us in the present inquiry.

“Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus His Mother, and His Mother’s sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His Mother and the disciple standing whom He loved, He saith to His Mother, Woman, behold thy Son! After that He saith to the disciple, Behold thy Mother! And from that hour the disciple took her to his own.” The meanings hidden in these simple words are capable of very long exposition, but we must be content with drawing out some of the most obvious and most important to ourselves. In the first place we must remember what has already been said, that the words before us, like the others spoken at the same time, must be understood in the fullest and loftiest sense which can be given to them, and that we are now listening to the words of the Saviour from the Cross distributing, so to say, the fruits of the great triumph which He was now accomplishing. The first obvious meaning of the Word before us, which has been adopted by many of the Fathers, is that which has reference

to the state of bereavement and loneliness in which the Blessed Mother would be left by the Death of our Lord. These Fathers see in the word a moral lesson, as St. Augustine says, by which children have the example of our Lord given them as to providing for their parents before leaving them in destitution. Our Blessed Lady was about to be left, not only, as she already was, a widow, but also a widow deprived of the companionship and support of her only Son, on Whom she depended for everything that she could require. It was meet therefore that her Son should give her some one to take His own place towards her, as the support and consolation of her declining years. This our Lord did by looking on her and St. John at the foot of His Cross, and by commending her to him and him to her. And this seems to be confirmed by the words which follow, in which it is said, that from that hour the disciple took her to his own. When he took her to his own it must have been in obedience to our Lord's last injunction, and in acceptance of the trust or office committed to him thereby, and thus the action of the Apostle is a sufficient commentary to us on the words of our Lord, and explains the meaning which St. John attached to them.

But this interpretation requires deepening and intensifying before it can be admitted as exhausting the meaning of these great words. For it might be so understood as to signify something that might have been arranged as well at any other time as on this great occasion of the speaking from the Cross, something that would not rise to any very sublime commission or charge, something that would have

little to do with the accomplishment of the great Sacrifice by means of which the Redemption of the world was brought about, something that would not be an application of its fruits and merits, something that might have been won by Mary at a less cost than the martyrdom which she had been enduring with so heroic a faith and constancy and fortitude, something which might have given her some consolation, perhaps, and have been accepted by her with her usual loving gratitude, but which would have been a boon comparatively poor for her at the time that her Son was disposing so royally of the fruits of His victory on the Cross. And thus we find that this interpretation does not altogether satisfy the Christian instinct about our Blessed Lady. The Son Who was speaking to her was more than the prop of her age and the comfort of her solitude in temporal matters. Her mothership was something more than dependence on Him in these respects. But the words imply that John was to be to her, as far as might be, as our Lord had been and was, and that she was to be to John all she had been and was to our Lord. And whatever the boon or the commission was, now conferred on our Lady and St. John, it must be something that was an application of the fruits of the Divine Sacrifice which was now being consummated, something belonging to the Kingdom which issued from the Cross.

It is clear that our Lord, in here addressing His Mother by the same name which He seems ordinarily to have used to her, may well be considered as having referred to the name which she bore in prophecy as the Woman promised from the

beginning to our first parents, between whom and the serpent enmities were to be set by the hand of God, the Woman whose Seed was to be the Redeemer of mankind, the Woman who by a marvellous privilege was to "compass a Man,"³ that is to conceive a Man, the Messiah Himself, in her virgin womb by the operation of the Holy Ghost. When He had used the word to her at the marriage-feast of Cana, it could not be said, as it is beautifully said about the present occasion by some of the Fathers, that He forebore to call her Mother, in order that the tenderness of the word might not increase her grief. It is well known that the rightful translation of the Greek word would probably be "Lady." But in any case it seems better, when we are dealing with this most solemn and awful occasion of the words on the Cross, to consider that the name was used with reference to the Scriptural position of the Mother of the Redeemer. This at once takes our thoughts away from the common consideration of our Lady as if she were only addressed as the mother of the young man raised from the dead at Naim might have been addressed. The words were the words of the Redeemer, speaking to the appointed Mother who had been with Himself the subject of so much prophecy and anticipation.

When we put this thought by the side of the other, which has to be remembered here, that the occasion is that of the distribution of the highest crowns and recompences of the Kingdom of redemption, we see no difficulty at all in understanding how

3 Jerem. xxxi. 22.

our Lord is now committing our Lady and St. John the one to the other in place of Himself, making Mary the Mother of St. John in His own place, and St. John the son of Mary in His own place. And we see great reason for not limiting the relationship thus divinely ordained between them, to the attendance and care of our Lady, in temporal things, and the necessities of daily life, on the part of the Apostle, or to the motherly interest and loving dependence on her new Son on the part of the Mother, to which in other cases the words might seem to be confined. Such a limitation has never satisfied ordinary Christian devotion, although it is very true indeed that the example which the word would then contain, is beautiful and full of instruction to us. But we are led to think that it is more beautiful and more instructive than it would have been, if spoken by another person and of another person. We have to remember Who our Lord is, and who Mary is.

We have been engaged in tracing the position occupied by our Blessed Lady with regard to the work which our Lord came into the world to do, the work of the redemption of mankind, the founding of the new Kingdom of Heaven, with all the variety of its organization, through the whole of which is to run the strong mutual bond of the most tender, perfect, and Divine charity. In the earlier part of our Lady's companionship with our Lord she had had a share of her own in all the mysteries which succeeded one to the other, in the development of the Divine counsel regarding Him. When the time came for Him to begin His active course of preaching and

teaching, and of the formation of His Church, we have seen her by His side almost continually, and quite continually occupied in a work of her own in correspondence with that work of His, following it with the most attentive contemplation, honouring it and doing it homage with the most grateful adoration, and aiding in the application of its benefits to the souls of men by the most fervent intercession. She lived for her Son and in the work of her Son. But now, as far as was possible to any creature, she had had a part in the way of sympathy and consent and compassion, in the fullest sense of the word, in the great and stupendous work of His redemption, not quite in the same way in which she had borne a part of her own in the Incarnation itself, but still a part of her own, in accordance with the dispositions of Divine Providence, which had ordained that she should stand by the Cross, and that all through the Passion she should be most closely united to His sacrifice of Himself. The first consent of Mary at the Annunciation, in all its freedom and deliberateness, gave her a share in all the issues of the Incarnation which must not be forgotten, even when we are speaking of the Passion.

From the time of the Incarnation, the redemption of the world by our Lord had occupied her thoughts and her heart entirely and absolutely. Meanwhile she had been mounting ever higher and higher from the very beginning in the scale of her marvellous sanctity, which was at the first a sanctity altogether unparalleled, and which had increased daily more and more, until the last few hours of the Passion had witnessed an increase out of all proportion to

the marvels which had been witnessed before, by reason of the intensity of the sufferings which she had endured, the perfection of her union with the Divine will in her own crucifixion as well as that of her Son, and also because the Passion was a time of meriting altogether unequalled in itself, apart even from the intensity of her sufferings and the perfection of her conformity. It was as if all the creative and maturing power of a whole spring and summer had been condensed into a single hour.

Our Lady now stood under the Cross to hear our Lord allot to her her crown and reward, as He had just allotted the crown due to him to the penitent thief. It must be something which would correspond to the office which she had been discharging, not only during the whole of her life with our Lord, but especially at this last stage of that life in which the Passion consisted. It must be something that would be an embodiment to her of the immense graces and victories of the Cross, something which would be a trophy of the conflict, a memorial of the victory, a fruit of the suffering and the merit, a fountain of perpetual joy and power and beneficence, flowing from the achievement of the redemption in which she had borne her part. When we understand what is involved in and required by these conditions in the reward of our Lady, we can trace out without much difficulty what is meant by the words which bestow her, in lieu of her Son, on the Beloved Disciple, and made him her son in lieu of our Lord.

The charge or commission begins with the

committal of St. John to our Lady as her child. "Woman, behold thy Son." She was to regard him as now representing our Lord in the new Kingdom, which was founded on the Passion. Our Lord could not mean that He was Himself to pass from her heart, for that would have been indeed a sentence of death for that blessed soul. Our Lord knew, as she knew also, that the separation between them was but for a few hours, and that He would then again be by her side until the moment came for Him to rise to Heaven. Nor in the interval of the forty hours was she to be without her usual keen sense of His spiritual presence, or ignorant of the marvellous mysteries which were taking place in the world beyond the grave. St. John was to have his peculiar and most blessed office of being her companion and guard after our Lord's departure, as long as she survived, though our Lord was to be always present with her in a new way, no longer that of visible presence. What our Lord had been in the habit of doing in the way of temporal care for her, guidance of her steps, and the like, that St. John, the Beloved Disciple, was henceforth to be. Our Lord had supplied the place of St. Joseph as well as His own. In this sense she was to depend on St. John in the place of our Lord.

He had been consecrated priest at the Last Supper, and he was to discharge to her that blessed office of ministering to her the Blessed Sacrament and celebrating for her the Adorable Sacrifice, and they were to be the inmates of the same home, as had been the case with our Lord and His Mother, as long as there was a home for them. In other

respects St. John was committed to her as the object of her love and of her prayers, the centre of her interests and cares. Not St. John alone, for he was but one of the Apostolic company, and all the Apostles, and indeed all the faithful, were committed to her motherly care by these words from the Cross. St. John indeed was very dear to our Lord, and so he was especially chosen as the guardian and companion of the Virgin Mother. But as the child of Mary, St. John, however specially dear to her, for the same reason as to our Lord, was the representative of the whole Church, in whose behalf our Lady was now to exercise by the special command of our Lord all her love and all her power. Her office was to be a continuance of that which she had already been exercising for so long, for she saw in the Church the work for which her Son came on earth, the one thing in the world for which He lived and for which He was to die. Whether her office be called intercession or patronage, power or influence, matters little indeed. The effect of these words of our Lord to her, which, as has been said, were creative words, and wrought what they signified, was to make her the Mother of the Church and of all its children, with the same devotion and the same Divine grace for the discharge of her duty as had been hers in the discharge of her motherly duties to our Lord Himself.

One thing, however, was changed—that she was now the Mother of Him Who had accomplished the work of redemption, the work of which He had said, how was He straitened until it was accomplished. The fire which He came to send on earth was now

not a thing of the future only, but it had been already kindled, the debt had been paid to the justice of the Eternal Father, the treasures of grace had been won, and were now to be administered and distributed. By the difference between our Lord's Kingdom in general before and after the Passion, we may measure the difference between the power of the prayer and patronage of Mary as they had been, and as they were henceforth to be.

We must not forget, as has been said, that the charge given by our Lord in this third Word from the Cross was not only to His Blessed Mother. It was also to St. John, first in his own person, but also as the representative of the whole Church. It might perhaps have sufficed in rigour to make only one Word, in which either Mary might have been told to "behold her Son," or John might have been told to "behold his Mother." The one charge might have been considered as including the other. But this was not what our Lord chose on this most solemn occasion. His Words were few indeed, but still He chose that in that small number both the separate charge to Mary and the separate charge to St. John should have a place. This shows us, at all events, the immensity of His love for this new relationship which He was creating, and His great desire that both parties thus bound together should fully understand their duties to each other, and the claims they had on each other. And St. John seems to take care that we should understand this, and that he immediately acted on the injunction of His Master, for he tells us of this second charge and of its effects on himself. "After that He saith to the

disciple, Behold thy Mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own." The words cannot signify his own home. For it was not for some considerable time after this Word of our Lord that either Mary or John could have left Calvary, nor is it at all probable that St. John had a home of his own to which he could take this Blessed Mother. He had probably never had a home of his own, apart from the house of his parents in which he had been brought up, for he had never married.

The best translation of the Greek words is probably that with which we are familiar, "He took her unto his own." That is, he made her in every respect his Mother. The relation between mother and child is the tenderest that we have any experience of, and all the world understands it as such. The foundation is always the same, though the form in which the relationship works in practical life varies indefinitely with circumstances and times. When the child is an infant the mother is everything, and provides it with everything. When the mother is aged and feeble, the relationship is the same as ever, but it is now the part of the mother to be dependent and of the child to support and provide for her. So the circumstances of health or sickness, poverty or wealth, power, station, and the like, make numberless alterations in the exercise of the duties and affections which the relationship implies. In the case of our Lord with His Mother, He was the most dutiful and reverent, as well as the most loving, of sons. But He was her God, and He came into the world as Man for a special work for His Father's

glory, over which she could have no control. Thus His conduct to her, as we have seen, varied in certain details at various times. But He was always her Son and she was always His Mother, and as her Son He gave her the whole love of His Heart, as she gave Him her whole love as His Mother.

The relation between St. John and his new Mother, and between all those who were represented by St. John, when this commission was given to him by our Lord, must be measured in the same way. Or rather it can have no measure beyond what follows naturally from the position of the Mother and the children in the Kingdom of our Lord. St. John knew the dignity, the sanctity, the dearness of our Lady to our Lord. He knew her unique elevation, and the designs of God with regard to her. By the side of these the duties imposed upon him of her protection and guardianship, of attending to her few wants and giving her the comfort and consolation and companionship of a son, would seem to him light burthens indeed. The balance between what he could do for her and what she could do for him would certainly not seem to be struck on her side. He at least was the gainer by the Divine Word which knit them together. He could give her the love of a heart that had caught some of our Lord's own intensity of affection by leaning on that Sacred Bosom, but he was to receive in return all the love, the tenderness, the watchful care, the powerful protection of the heart of that incomparable Mother. All her love for our Lord was to work itself out in love for him.

Moreover, St. John did not perhaps perfectly

understand, at this time of the Passion, the whole of its effects, and especially the whole of its results with regard to the Blessed Mother, what was the counsel of God in setting her to suffer so much by the side of our Lord, what was the reward which would be proportioned by the decree of God to her faithfulness in this last and greatest trial, and to the intensity of her sufferings, and how what we call the communication of the Passion to her involved a very great power in the application of its fruits by her patronage and intercession. But he must soon have learnt these things after the Resurrection of our Lord, in the course of his subsequent intercourse with our Lady, and of the unfolding of the history of the Church, in which he himself was to have so large a part. What he would feel all through would be that, whatever Mary was in the Kingdom of her Son, she was to him principally and above all things his Mother, so instituted by the special act of our Lord dying on the Cross. Our Lord's thoughtful love had chosen this most solemn moment of His whole Life, when the great Sacrifice of the Cross was being accomplished, and the whole treasures of Heaven were laid open to Him for the children of men, to make this most sacred alliance between Mary and His Apostles. Whatever Mary had was his, as her son. Whatever that most loving and charitable and grateful heart could do for him or win for him, was his. She was in truth to live for him and he to live for her, in the same way as she had lived for our Lord and He for her. She might rise ever higher still in sanctity, even after the Ascension and the Day of Pentecost, she might pass out of this world to her throne on

high, and he might see her no more on earth. But ever and everywhere she would be his Mother. The relation had been made by God, and no one could put them asunder. The ever increasing height of her elevation could not raise her too high for this relation. It only gave her greater opportunities of love and beneficence, as her power and her charity increased, in proportion as she drew ever nearer and nearer to God.

This relation between Mary and the blessed Evangelist and Apostle is an instance of a class of truths or facts in the Kingdom of our Lord, the best explanation and commentary on which is to be found in the spirit, the mind, the heart, and the practice of the Church. We live at the end of so many centuries after the Crucifixion, and we may fairly look around us and ask ourselves, What is the fruit of this great Word of our Lord from the Cross, how is it understood in the Church, and what results has it produced? And the answer that springs to our lips is, The result and fruit of this Word of our Lord are to be found in the whole history of the devotion of the Church to Mary, and of the marvellous benefits which have resulted from that devotion. For the heart of the Church has never allowed of the thought that this was a personal gift to the blessed Apostle, which was confined to him, and ended with him. She might as well have supposed that when our Lord gave St. Peter the Keys of the Kingdom, or when He promised to be with the Apostles all days unto the consummation of the world, those gifts came to an end when the persons to whom the words were spoken passed from this

earthly scene into another world. There are reasonable arguments enough which, in this case, would make such an interpretation impossible, for how can it be thought that St. John would have put on record a merely personal boon to himself? But if such reasons did not exist, still the instinct of the Church would have been from the first that such could not have been the thought of the Sacred Heart, such could not have been a gift to satisfy the heart of Mary.

It has been said elsewhere that it may be thought probable that, if we had more records and more information to guide us positively as to the manner of regarding the Blessed Mother of God which was ordinary among the Apostolical Christians, we should not find that there was any great difference between ourselves and them, in this particular.⁴ But even if this conjecture were not true, we should still be quite safe in finding an answer to our question about the results of this Word, in what we know of the mind and habits of the Church all over the world, for so many centuries subsequent to the Apostles. If it were not so engrained as it is in the mind of the Christian people, that Mary is a Queen in the Kingdom of her Son, and that she is our Mother, so made by the special appointment of our Lord, which includes an injunction on us of honouring her and having the most trustful recourse to her as such—if the whole world were not full of the memorials of her constant care for the Christian commonwealth—if the calendar were not full of her feasts, if the private devotions of Christian families were not so

4 See *The Preparation of the Incarnation*, Note to Ch. iii.

constantly placing them at her feet, if the saints of God whom the Church sets up as our models of love of Him were not so uniformly conspicuous for their love of and trust in her—if, in short, Heaven and earth were not full of voices telling us how good a Mother we have in Mary, perhaps we should not venture to say so certainly that this Word means what we believe it to mean. For then we should have to account for the want of correspondence to so plain an injunction on the part of those who have gone before us in the Church. There would be evidence one way, instead of the other. But as the facts of history are what they are, they furnish the best of explanation of the text of which we are speaking. They show us that it was not a passing word of kindness and affection, but an occasion on which the foundation was laid by Divine and creative words, for one of the greatest of the earthly glories of God and blessings to mankind. They show that the Church has caught up what our Lord said and did, with an instinct which comes from the union of her heart with His, and has taken care that these Divine words shall not pass away.

After the third Word, addressed to His Mother and to St. John, our Lord may be said to have spoken no more directly to any human being. The four last Words were either addressed to God and His Father, as the fourth and the seventh, or they were ejaculations, one of which, the fifth Word, was no doubt spoken for the purpose of producing some action on the part of those who heard Him, that is, the giving Him the sponge full of vinegar. The fourth Word, then, was the verse from the

beginning of the twenty-first Psalm, which He uttered in Hebrew, "Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" and the seventh Word, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit," is found in the thirtieth Psalm. Some devout persons have supposed that our Lord recited to Himself all the intermediate verses between those two which He uttered aloud. If this could be ascertained, we should have a long subject for meditation in the hundred and fifty verses which intervene between the first of these verses and the last.

There seems also good reason for thinking that all these four Words were spoken quite at the end, or nearly at the end, of the three hours. For St. John tells us that the fifth Word, "I thirst," was spoken in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, that is, in order that what he relates might take place, that the vinegar might be given Him, as has been said, and that thus this last particular of the prophetic description of the Passion might be supplied. The sixth Word, "It is consummated," naturally followed immediately on the accomplishment of the Scripture, and the final Word, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit," would come directly after that. There remains only the fourth Word therefore, in which, because He spoke in Hebrew, some of the bystanders thought that He was calling on Elias. As to this, it may not seem so certain that the time can be fixed. Still, this Word is apparently connected, in the narrative of St. Matthew and St. Mark, with the exclamation of thirst. For these Evangelists tell us that it was

after the fourth Word—they do not mention the fifth—that the sponge full of vinegar was offered to Him, and that then it was said by some one there, “Stay, let us see whether Elias will come to deliver Him.” There must therefore, it would seem, have been no great distance of time between the fourth Word and the fifth, which last is mentioned by St. John alone. There would therefore seem to have been a long period of silence, for the two first Words must have been spoken early in the three hours. We cannot tell at what time precisely the third Word was uttered.

These four last Words need not be commented on by us at any great length. They must have sunk into the tender heart of our Blessed Lady with immense pain, for they showed how terrible still were the sufferings of our Lord, notwithstanding the utter exhaustion to which He was reduced, which might have taken the place of positive pain. The first of these words revealed the absolute dereliction and desolation of His Soul. His Soul was always united to the Divine Person of the Word, and in this respect it could never be abandoned or forsaken. Even after the separation between the Soul and Body of our Lord, the Divinity remained united to each. Nor again could there be abandonment of one of the Divine Persons by the other two, nor could our Lord’s Soul lose the Beatific Vision. Nor could the Soul of our Lord be abandoned by God, in the sense in which the sinner is forsaken by God when he commits a deliberate and grave sin. But our Lord suffered in His Soul the extreme of dereliction which was possible to Him, in the utter

destitution in which He was left of all consolation, comfort, spiritual joy, and the like, and this, which He chose to undergo for our sakes, was an immense torment, and one which He chose that we should know that He had suffered, in order that when we are exposed, as may sometimes be the case, to far less torments of the same character, we might be able to take refuge in the thought of His Passion, which included this dereliction. And to our Blessed Lady, who knew so well the whole range of the ineffable consolations which come from the sensible presence of God in the soul, it must have seemed an unutterable pang that her Son should suffer in this way also. It might have seemed that the chalice of the Passion had nothing more left in it for Him to quaff, and now there was this piteous cry from Him Who never complained, which revealed the truth that He allowed Himself to approach the very lowest depths of possible miseries. For the dereliction of the soul by God, in the fullest sense, in which it could not be in Him, is the very last extreme of the sufferings of the lost. It has been thought that our Lord may now have had before His mind that most utter disappointment, of which mention has been made in speaking of the Agony in the Garden. This consisted in the clear foresight that there were to be so many for whom all His labours and sufferings would be in vain, or still more, the occasion of the aggravation of their sins and so of their punishments hereafter. This thought may have accompanied the extreme withdrawal of all consolation of which mention has been made. But to our Lady it would not be so much the cause of the

suffering of our Lord at this point which would be so painful, as the knowledge of the suffering itself, and that our Lord thought so much of it as to vent His grief in the plaintive words of the prophetic Psalm, in which so many of the details of the Passion are set forth.

The fifth Word may have been a simple expression of the fact that our Lord allowed Himself to suffer that most intense anguish which is caused in the dying under certain circumstances by the extreme thirst to which they are subjected. For this is a pain of which numbers have experience who do not die by any violent death, and thus it may have been a compassionate condescension of His, that we might know that He had undergone it and sanctified it for us. Others have seen here the expiation for that terrible sin of drunkenness, which does so much to desolate the world, and hence there has sprung up a reparatory devotion to the Holy Thirst. In this sense it seems natural enough to understand the words in their simplest meaning, and our Lord is said by the Evangelist who relates them to have spoken in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But of course we cannot forget the other and far more excruciating thirst, that of the Heart of our Lord for the conversion of sinners and the salvation of men, in His burning suffering from which He is but too often treated in the same way as now in His Passion, by having His thirst met by what can only aggravate it and add a kind of insult to the cruelty with which His complaints are returned. And our Blessed Lady could well understand all the torments which He had to endure in that last hour of

terrible thirst, for He had no relief or food since He left the Cenacle the night before, and almost the whole of the intermediate hours had been crowded with exertions and sufferings of various kinds. Besides this, His loss of blood had been enormous, amounting almost to the total emptying of His veins, and this of itself is enough to bring on the most torturing thirst. And still more would she enter into the thirst of the Sacred Heart of which we have spoken. Moreover, we must remember the peculiar pain which she must have felt in seeing herself there close to the side of her Son in His bitter thirst, and without the power to alleviate His agony by so much as a cup of cold water. She must leave the satisfaction of His need to His enemies, and witness the aggravation of His pains by the offering to Him of the sponge full of vinegar.

When we arrive at the sixth Word, we seem to be drawing near to the moment of victory and triumph. For there cannot but be a satisfaction in the thought that any great work has been accomplished, and an immense boon for the whole world won. And yet, regarding these words from the point of view of the Blessed Mother, there was a terrible pang in store for her, the approach of which she felt more and more nearly, as the swift minutes ebbed away which were yet to intervene before the fulfilment of the three hours. It was a note almost of triumph for our Lord that He could say that all was consummated, the satisfaction for sin, the restoration of the glory of the Father, the salvation of mankind, the foundation of the Church, the opening of the Kingdom of Heaven, and that all the

pains and humiliations of the Passion were soon to be over, and the great struggle for the overthrow of the kingdom of Satan perfectly completed. All these things would be joy to the heart of our Blessed Lady also, for she loved nothing but the glory of God and the success of the work of her Son, nor could she fail to rejoice over the defeat of Satan, nor could she wish the Passion itself to be prolonged. But when the Passion should be accomplished finally, there must come death—the separation of the Body and Soul of our Lord, the cessation of that blessed life of the Sacred Humanity, and she would be left, and the world would be left, without Jesus Christ! This was the prospect included in the announcement of the consummation of the great act of God's justice of which she had been for many hours the witness, writing in her heart of hearts every pang, every insult, every word and action of her Blessed Son. No doubt as, all through, she had looked first of all to the will of God and His glory in the execution of the Passion, so now the thought that the victory was accomplished, and, as Daniel says, "eternal justice brought in" by the work of her Son, would be uppermost in her mind. But in her, as in our Lord, there was no confusion of one thing with another, no overlaying of pain by joy, no smothering of anguish in oblivion on account of some counter-vailing affection. Her heart had to prepare itself for the sight of His breathing out His last, and this was nearer and nearer to her with every one of the words that fell in succession from His lips. And the same may be said of the last great cry, when our Lord most lovingly commended His Soul to His

Father. It was a moment full of the holiest affections—a sacramental moment, we may say, for it was the consecration of death for all mankind by the touch of the Incarnate God. It was the turning the enemy who had been let loose on man by the sin of Adam into a friend, and whose hands were full of graces and gifts. But still to the heart of the Mother at the foot of the Cross it was, with all its elements of triumph and consolation, a moment of the deepest pang that human heart can feel, in the destruction of the life in which she had lived more than in her own.

Thus we notice here what has already been remarked on, that the Compassion of our Lady lasts on much longer than the Passion of our Lord. The moment of His death changes the whole tenour of His existence, for He at once enters on a world far nobler than this, the world of the departed spirits, and in this He is at once acknowledged as King and Deliverer, His enemies falling back and fleeing before His Face, His saints flocking forth to meet Him at the gates which had been broken down by the breath of His approach. His Soul is in glory and beatitude, and He finds Himself at once the source of untold joy and unmixed blessings to thousands and thousands of His redeemed. But we must not endeavour to follow Him at once over the new realm on which He had now entered as Sovereign. Our place must still be on the mount of shame and suffering, where the lifeless Body hangs on the Cross, and the Mother and St. John and Magdalene are still watching as the darkness rolls away, and the daylight returns for the space between the ninth hour and the setting of

the sun. There is silence there. Only the centurion makes his confession of faith, and the crowds retire beating their breasts. Even the great portents, the rending of the veil of the Holy of Holies in the Temple, the earthquake, the opening of the rocks, the appearances of the saints, what were they all to those who stood gazing on the Body in which life had been and in which life was not? But now Mary's part is to begin. In the depth of her grief she has to act and to direct others, while, as far as human powers go, she is as helpless as was ever the mother of one who had been executed on a cross.

But Mary could not feel helpless, it was now that she showed even more than before, the immense fortitude and calm wisdom which were but natural accompaniments to her glorious faith and intelligence of the ways and counsels of God, her part was to pray without anxiety amid all her grief. She knew that God would not leave her without help in her office of seeing to the last honourable services which were due to the Sacred Body which hung there on the Cross. It must be taken down and prepared for burial, a grave must be found, and It must be deposited there with all the reverence and worship with which the Church adores the Blessed Sacrament when reposing in the sepulchres in the churches between Holy Thursday and Good Friday. Even in the deepest human grief it is a relief to have something on which to occupy our minds and cares in the way of service to the departed, and with our Blessed Lady there was no pause for the simple indulgence of grief. She was

helpless to the outward eye, but she was mighty in the power of her irresistible prayer.

It must have been before the Death of our Lord and the portents in the temple and in the city by which that Death was accompanied, or immediately followed, that the Chief Priests, in their thoughtfulness for everything that might tend to the dishonour of our Lord, begged Pilate that he would give orders that the legs of the crucified persons might be broken so as to accelerate their death, in order that the bodies might be removed from the sight of men before the evening came which ushered in the approaching Sabbath. Orders were accordingly given, and the first incident on Calvary after the expiration of our Lord and the departure of the people beating their breasts, was the appearance of the party of soldiers charged with the execution of these orders. The Evangelist who witnessed all that passed, tells us that they came, and finding the two thieves still alive broke their legs, as it seems with massive iron rods or hammers, but that when they came to our Lord, they saw that He was dead and did not therefore break His legs. The Sacred Body was thus spared the insult and profanation which would have been involved in this, and the soldiers unconsciously fulfilled the Scriptural precept about the Paschal Lamb, that "not a bone of it should be broken."⁵ Thus one great danger and anxiety was over. But immediately there followed what seemed like a wanton insult on the part of one of the soldiers. He ran at the Body of our Lord with his lance, and pierced it with a deep

⁵ Exodus xii. 46.

wound on one side of the Heart, passing his spear through the Heart itself, and making the point appear on the other side. This poor soldier may have been actuated by a wish to make the Death of our Lord beyond all question, and in this he may have acted under the same Divine guidance which shows itself in many of the incidents of the Passion and the Resurrection, providing the most irresistible arguments for the perfection of the proof of our Lord's Sacrifice and Resurrection from the dead. For, merely as a contribution to the evidence of our Lord's Death, this act of Longinus was most wonderfully appropriate, for it could never be said after this that there had been any mistake, that the other two crucified with Him had been found alive by the soldiers, and that it was highly probable that their impression of the Death of our Lord was erroneous.

But God had higher designs than this in the action of Longinus. We are certain of this from the solemn manner in which St. John speaks of it in his Gospel. "But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was dead, they did not break His legs, but one of the soldiers opened His side with a spear, and immediately there came out Blood and Water. And he that saw it gave testimony and his testimony is true, and he knoweth that he saith true that you also may believe. For these things were done that the Scripture might be fulfilled, 'You shall not break a bone of Him,' and again another Scripture saith, 'They shall look on Him Whom they pierced.'"⁶ The fulfilment of the Scripture in

⁶ Zach. xii. 10.

this, as in the other case of the not breaking His legs, is an addition to the complete argument from the correspondence between the prophetic description of the Passion and its actual history. But the language of St. John, in speaking of the opening of the side of our Lord, seems to signify that there was something more included in this action. Here again we have the universal feeling and sense of the Church to guide us in our commentary on the words of the Evangelist. The Fathers tell us that in this incident we have the representation of the birth of the Church from the side of our Lord, a birth which had been foreshadowed in the creation of Eve, who was taken by God from the side of Adam while he lay in a deep sleep. Our Lord indeed lay in a deep sleep, for it was the sleep of death, when His Spouse was born from His side. And this commentary may be said to rest on the authority of St. Paul, who, in his famous passage about the union between man and wife as representing that between Christ and the Church, refers distinctly to the words of Adam about Eve, saying, "We are members of His Body, of His Flesh and of His Bones," and then he goes on to quote the very words which follow, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall stick to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh." It is clear that the Apostle had this mystery of the piercing of the side in his mind when he wrote that passage.⁷

The Fathers tell us that the Blood and Water which now issued from the pierced Heart of our

7 Ephes. v. 30, 31; Genesis ii. 23, 24.

Lord signify to us the Church, because the Church is formed from the two great Sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist, represented, the one by the Water, and the other by the Blood which issued from the open side of our Lord. Thus Mary was present on this occasion of the birth of the Church, and although the Evangelist may not at the time have understood the mystery, it is natural to suppose that our Blessed Lady was not without an intelligence of what was taking place. Tradition goes on to say that she was praying for Longinus, who was inflicting so sore a wound on her own heart by his rude cruelty to the Sacred Body, when some of the Water which came forth from the opened side would strike on his face, and produce a miraculous cure of the weakness of eyesight under which he laboured. This Water is considered, moreover, to have acted as the Water of Baptism for him, and he was then and there ~~illustrated~~ by a marvellous interior light, which enabled him to see the dignity and office of Him Whom he was thus insulting, and brought about his conversion.

Thus once more the good Providence of God had watched over the bereaved Mother in her loneliness on Mount Calvary. But there was as yet nothing visible in the way of help for the great undertaking of the deposition from the Cross and the burial of our Lord. The time was drawing on, and soon the evening would be falling. Mary's prayer continued, and before long its fruits were seen. Indeed, its power had already been working. While the scene of the piercing of the side was passing on the hill of execution, the Providence of

God was bringing about, in its own way, the burial of our Lord. There were in Jerusalem probably more than the two men whose names have been preserved to us, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, who were secretly disciples of our Lord among the higher classes in society, men who longed for the salvation of Israel, but who were for the time too timid to venture to declare themselves, in the face of the certain opposition and persecution to which they would be exposed from the priests in power. They had not been bold enough to make any open resistance to the violent and savage measures of the dominant party, though they had refrained from all open participation in the steps taken for the condemnation of our Lord.

It might be natural that the scenes of the day which was now drawing to its close, should have sufficed to drive them still more into retirement and concealment, and have taken away what little courage may have remained in them for any avowal of their reverence for our Lord. But the grace of the Passion was working in their hearts, the grace which had made the thief on the cross bold enough for his confession of faith, the grace which had converted the Centurion who had been in charge on Mount Calvary. These were just the men who were needed for the occasion of the sepulture of our Lord. Their rank and wealth and position gave them free access to the Roman Governor, who would be ready enough to oblige them, especially in anything that might seem to favour the honour of the Crucified, for Whom he himself had felt so much sympathy. Thus a bold and determined act on

their part would meet with no opposition, although it might lead afterwards to consequences which might involve suffering to them. It is not certain that these two acted in concert at the beginning. Joseph went in boldly, the Evangelist says, to Pilate, and asked for the Body of Jesus. Pilate was not certain whether He was already dead, for it may have been almost at once after the order had been given for the breaking of the legs that Joseph made his request. The Centurion set him at rest on this point, and Pilate gave Joseph leave to do as he wished. As he seems to have come to Calvary in company with Nicodemus, who had also prepared a large quantity of spices for the embalming of the Sacred Body, it is likely that he had communicated with him as soon as Pilate had given his permission. Joseph had brought the sheet in which the Body was to be wrapped, and the two with some of the servants now made their way to Calvary.

Thus came about that most touching scene of the deposition and burial of our Lord, according to the desires of the Heart of the bereaved Mother, who never left Him till He was placed in the tomb. The tomb was close at hand. It had been prepared by Joseph for his own burial. But now he made it over to our Lord, and it was to become for all ages the holiest spot on earth, though its history is a sad comment on the treatment of our Lord and His religion on the part of the world. The two noble servants of our Lord paid due honour and homage to our Lady on their arrival on Calvary, and then, with her consent, proceeded to their holy work. Maria de Agreda has described the whole in a few

graphic sentences. Our Lady, we are told by her, was asked, first through St. John, and then by Joseph himself, to withdraw to a little distance, but she refused, saying she had seen our Lord crucified, and could not shrink from seeing Him taken down from the Cross. The utmost reverence was observed, as if they had been priests ministering at the altar. The Crown of Thorns was gently and reverently detached from the sacred brow, and given to our Lady, who at once knelt to it, and gave it its due honour as a most holy relic. The nails were taken out with infinite care, and given in the same way to our Lady. That was the beginning in the Christian Church of the veneration of the relics of the Passion.

Next there came the more difficult task of lowering the Sacred Body itself, gently, slowly, carefully, that there might be no slip or sudden fall or shock of any kind, till at length, after the most reverent handling on the part of the two men and St. John, it was laid in the arms of the Mother who had first embraced it in the stable of Bethlehem. All due worship was rendered to it both by Mary and the saints assembled with her, and thus it rested for a time, amid the adoring sobs and tears of the whole company, until the remembrance of the approach of evening roused them up to proceed with their mournful work. The handling of the Sacred Body was now left to the Blessed Mother. She it was who arranged the limbs and the hair, wiping away too, as far as could be, the traces of the cruel treatment to which it had been exposed, but leaving the precious drops of Blood, and closing up the gashes and wounds with the precious herbs and unguents which Nicodemus

had brought. All was done swiftly but not hurriedly, in the quiet composed solemn manner in which all the actions of our Lord and His Blessed Mother were performed. Magdalene was there, at the Feet, St. John at the Sacred Head, and she at least was not satisfied in her devotion, for she would have come on the third morning after to finish the work of embalming. After a loving adoration, the Sacred Body was enfolded by Mary's own hands in the sheet which was to become one of the most precious relics of the Church, and then, with thousands of angels invisibly accompanying them, the holy band of disciples and faithful women, swollen now, perhaps, by some few who had come from the city, formed the funeral procession which was to bear our Lord to His last home. St. John, Joseph, and Nicodemus were joined, we are told, by the converted centurion, and bore the Sacred Body. Our Lady followed with Magdalene, the Maries, and the other women and disciples. The sepulchre was but a few steps from Calvary. So wonderfully had everything been arranged for the convenience of the burial. One last act of adoration, one last look at the holy Face, and then the stone was rolled to the door of the sepulchre by Joseph himself. Mary rose from her knees to depart, with St. John, but it seems from the Gospel account that the tomb was not left altogether and at once. The tender devotion of Magdalene must have its fill. "And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre." The Roman guard would soon be there, and their presence would drive away the holy women.

It was probably our Blessed Lady's perfect calm and self-command that made her set the example to the others of leaving the sepulchre. It would have been natural for her to be the last, but she was not. She had work to do for our Lord, which the others had not to do. She was the centre now of the scattered flock of her Son. She adored the Cross on Calvary where it was left standing, and then went her way, as it seems, to the Cenacle, which was at no great distance. Her heart was with our Lord. He was actively occupied at this time, and ever since His Soul had left His Body, in the work of consoling and blessing and crowning the holy souls, who had waited so long for His arrival in the abode of the departed. Probably, could we trace out the tale of His activity in the forty hours which He spent in the realms below, we should see that never in His earthly life had He done so much and so many things for the glory of His Father and the good of men. Our Lady was to spend Holy Saturday, not indeed in activity like His, but in work which it was her part to do, and which was the holiest work on which any one left in this world could be employed.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOLY SATURDAY.

IN no part of the course of the Gospel history is the arrangement of events by the sweet Providence of God more delicately beautiful than in the incidents of Holy Saturday. The Church was like a garden which had been visited by a storm which had swept it bare, and reduced it to apparent desolation. The Shepherd had been smitten indeed, and the sheep had been scattered. Never since the world was had there been such calamity as that which had befallen the followers of our Lord. Never was there such deep grief wasting the holiest souls among the children of men, never ruin so great, never darkness so deep, enfolding the tenderest and yet the strongest hearts in the world. And yet there was light and hope and calm resolution, mutual union, the sense of great duties to be done and of great hopes made certain. This peace and ineffable confidence and strength of purpose had shown itself in the solemn ceremonies of the Burial of our Lord, Who had been borne to His grave as if all the world had indeed acknowledged Him as the King Whom Pilate had declared Him to be. The last thing we hear of the Sepulchre on the Friday night is that it is too precious to be left unguarded, and the

soldiers of the Imperial power are to remain and watch by it. His enemies thought they were inflicting a fresh stigma on His memory, in providing against the possible tricks of the disciples. But they were serving humbly the behests of His honour, and providing His Church with irrefragable evidence of strangers and enemies to the truth of His Death and Resurrection.

The same Providence which thus made use of the Priests and Pharisees for the future furnishing of evidence to the Church, had arranged that when the great blow of the Passion fell upon her children it should leave them as it might seem, without any natural leader, any recognized centre around which to gather and to rally. The Apostles were themselves dispersed and had fled from our Lord. It must have been known among the disciples that St. Peter had denied Him in the house of Caiphas. They were dispersed, scattered as our Lord said, "every man to his own,"¹ and it could not have been surprising humanly, if they had never come together again. It might have seemed that they hung so completely upon our Lord that when He had gone they would not have found any one to be their centre, even for the reception of the glorious tidings of the Resurrection. The hope that might have held them together, by remembering our Lord's words about the "third day," was shattered, because their faith had received so rude a blow. There was not strength enough in it, even among those who were marked out as leaders, to give them courage. The priests remembered our Lord's prediction, but

¹ St. John xvi. 32.

it was almost as if it had been never uttered to most of His disciples. And yet we find that on the Sunday morning, they are united and able to act and take counsel together without hesitation. The Body has not lost its cohesion, they are ready for the visits of their risen Lord. Nothing but the Sabbath had intervened, and, though the great news had to be broken to them most gently and most tenderly, and though the faith of some hung back for awhile on account of their excessive love, which made it seem impossible to receive what was the cause of delight so rapturous, the apparitions take place in their appointed order, and by the evening of the Sunday the scattered flock is once more united together.

But it is clear that they had not been gathered together, in the first instance, by the action of Peter or of the Apostles. Peter himself needed encouragement, consolation, assurance of pardon, the revival of his hope, perhaps even the strengthening of his faith. The Apostles need bringing together, and for this they needed some centre to which to betake themselves, and more than that, they needed some one who could speak to them in the Name of our Lord, some one who had never failed or fled or faltered, and in whose words they could hear the echoes of the loving and tender Heart of Him Whom they had deserted. This day between the Passion and the Resurrection was the most critical time in the history of the Church, and it was arranged by Providence that at this time there should be but one figure in the Church around which others could gather, and that that figure should be the Blessed Mother herself. It was the

time for the work and the office of the Mother of the Church to begin. It was not authority, or hierarchical rank, or the might of eloquence, or the power of miraculous signs, or even supreme sanctity, that made her the centre of the holy company. It was that now began to work, so soon after it had been spoken, that wonderful third Word from the Cross, "Behold thy Mother!"

We are told that when the Entombment was accomplished our Lady took her way to the Cenacle, which it must be supposed had been made over to the use of our Lord's followers by the devotion of its owner, and that she was accompanied by the women who had been with her on Calvary, save that "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary," as the Gospel says, lingered awhile watching the Tomb. St. John of course accompanied her also and acted as the visible superior, taking his counsels from our Lady. They prepared to pass the night in prayer and contemplation, and perhaps, some one of those who had seen most of the Passion might be asked to recount it for the rest. Mary would give herself in retirement to the old habit of her life, "keeping all these things, pondering them in her heart." Thus she might have repeated hour by hour, as the time passed on, the events of the last days. At all events, the whole of the marvellous history would furnish ample food for her intelligence, and exercise for the affections of her heart. But we may suppose also that she was not without some intelligence of what was passing in that other world in which our Lord was now applying most abundantly and prodigally the fruits and benefits of the Passion to a larger

and more noble assemblage of souls than could be found in that world of earth which He had left behind Him. For the world beyond the grave is not only more important than this, for the reason that we are to be there for ever, and here only for a short and uncertain time, and also because it contains a far larger number of the children of God, and is the home of all the great and good and saintly and heroic, not of one generation alone, but of all generations since the beginning of time. As the earth on which we live is but a dot in the midst of the universe, so the generation that finds itself at any given time in the occupation, so to speak, of the earth is but puny indeed when compared to the inhabitants of the other world. There is no ignorance or diversity of opinion there as to the truths of the creed, or the duties of creatures before their God. All are of one mind as to the eternal truths, and over the whole of the immense universe of souls and spirits our Lord's Kingdom was now extended without question and without resistance. We have considered it to have been the habit of our Blessed Lady from the first to take into her heart the various classes and communities of men who were brought before her in succession, in her companionship with our Lord, as for example, when the Shepherds came, or the Wise Kings of the East, or when she had to sojourn among the Egyptian Jews, and their heathen neighbours. In each such case she made the acquaintance of a new world of souls, with whom the work of her Divine Son lay, and she aided the work according to her power by her thanksgivings and intercessions. But

never had there been a revelation as to the extent of the Kingdom of our Lord equal to this in magnificence, and her heart stretched itself joyfully and thankfully in union with His own to welcome and embrace these new flocks of His redeemed.

Never was there such a contemplation of the Passion as that which now passed in the heart and mind of the Blessed Mother, fresh from her own experience of and participation in His Cross, a contemplation lit up by her intelligence of the ineffable triumph which had so soon followed on His Passion. The Passion has been the food of thousands of saintly hearts in every generation since that day, and will be the food of the successors in every generation till the end of time. But all these contemplations together have not been and will not be as perfect and rich in their fruits to the soul, as the contemplation of Mary. Foolish, indeed, it would be to attempt to fathom these depths. But of some things we may be sure. Whatever our Lady may have understood of the whole wonderful work of God, and the mightiness of the victory gained by our Lord, or of the beauty of His virtues in the Passion, or of the extreme intensity of His sufferings, she must have come forth from that meditation not only with her heart pierced anew with the sword which had been foretold to her, but with her heart also on fire, blazing with the flame of the most intense charity. The fire of the Sacred Heart must have been imparted to her in a manner and in a degree altogether without parallel. She must have understood also, from the words on the Cross, that this intense love of our Lord in the Passion found its

most fit and natural vent in the utmost compassion and mercifulness, mercifulness to the enemies who crucified Him, the friend who confessed Him, and to herself and the beloved disciple who stood beside Him. And thus she would be consumed with a thirst like His own for the redemption of souls, and for the exercise of mercy and compassion. Her part was to be the Mother, the Mother who does not consider the deserts of her children, but their needs, the Mother who does not desire to see justice done to them, but to see justice done to the intense mercifulness of our Lord, by the application, in the largest possible measure, of the healing and restoring powers of the grace which He had won. Thus Mary learnt at the foot of the Cross that great lesson which has governed her action in the Kingdom of her Son ever since, and will guide it to the end, that she is to be, above all other offices and titles, the Mother of Mercy, the Mother whose duty it is to plead for mercy upon mercy, to represent to our Lord the single purpose of His love, and exert herself with all her might over His Heart in the perpetual work of obtaining mercy from His compassion. Her heart had been most deeply wounded and had suffered as no heart ever could suffer except His own. It was large before beyond imagination, but the Passion and the Compassion had made it indefinitely larger and more tender. The intensity of her suffering generated in her this intensity of compassion, and of desire to see the streams of mercy flow forth in measureless volumes over the whole world which had treated Him so ill.

We are not told, we can only guess what were

the communings of that Blessed Mother during the hours of Holy Saturday with the children of our Lord, as they came to her one after another, drawn by the secret might of her incomparable charity, and closeness to our Lord. Peter would come, and the rest of the Apostles, and the holy women, and the happy disciples Nicodemus and Joseph, and others also whose names even we have never heard. They would come in their various states of remorse or grief, of doubt or hope, of utter prostration or of recovered peace. But they would all find in her the same intense compassion and sympathy, the same encouragement, the same promise of pardon and restoration. When the sun set on that Sabbath day, there would be a short time, before it was quite dark, which the holy women might turn to account, if they were so minded, for their preparations for the embalming which they hoped to perform on the following morning. It seems that on that evening Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulchre, and others perhaps also. Why should our Lady check their preparations, when they would be so pleasing to our Lord, and when the presence of these holy embalmers, who were to find nothing to embalm, was necessary, in the designs of Providence, that they might be the first informants to the Apostles that our Lord was no longer in the grave? There were to be several parties of them, as we shall see, and they were to have a most important office in the mystery of the Resurrection, though their spices and ointments were not to be used for that Sacred Body.

And so the night fell, and all was once more at

rest. A night of intense peace for the followers of our Lord, spent like the former night by our Lady in prayer and contemplation. Magdalene was to be at the sepulchre first of all, while it was yet dark, before the dawn had come, and yet before that the stone was to be rolled away. And before the stone was rolled away, our Lord was to have risen through the stone, as He had passed at the Nativity from His Mother's womb, leaving it intact. He was to be earlier than Magdalene, and with whom was He to be but His Mother? Here then we pause, while she is rapt in her prayer, tranquilly awaiting the moment of joy which was to recompense her for all her sorrows, and our Lord's glorious Soul is on its way with a band of blessed spirits, the flower of His redeemed, to enter once more into the Body resting in the sepulchre, and then to satisfy His Heart by presenting Himself to His Mother.

5/

909145











